



THE CRITICISM OF LITERATURE



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THE CRITICISM OF LITERATURE

BY

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TO MY SISTER

PREFACE

"Criticism," wrote Henri Frédéric Amiel, "is above all a gift, an intuition, a matter of tact and *flair*; it cannot be taught or demonstrated,—it is an art." In the face of such a statement, a book like this may seem an impertinence. But after conducting for five years, for college juniors and seniors, the course in literary criticism out of which this book has grown, I have become convinced that there is a place for a study of the characteristics of literature and of the fundamental principles of good criticism. And after all, we have schools for the teaching of the other arts. Why, then, should we not learn how to criticise? Some of those who study will be looking toward criticism as a profession; some will be present or prospective teachers of literature, who wish to help their students to understand great writing; some will belong to that large group of general readers, who desire fundamental principles to guide them toward an appreciation and a real enjoyment of the classics and a discriminating reading of current books. To all of these I hope this book will be of service.

The material in the text and in the exercises has been tested in the classroom and found practical. The illustrations and the selections suggested for study have been drawn both from older and from contemporary writing. The teacher who uses this book will be wise to add other passages of his own choosing. A plan which I have found successful, but which it was impossible to follow in the book because of the necessity of documenting all quotations, is to give to the class passages of prose and poetry

to be criticised without revealing the name of the author. The resulting lack of prejudice, whether favorable or unfavorable, on the part of the students, is of obvious value.

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I wish to express my grateful appreciation of the generous assistance of my colleagues in Goucher College. Dean Dorothy Stimson and Professor Joseph M. Beatty, Jr., of the Department of English, have read the entire book in manuscript and made many valuable suggestions. Professor Ethel Bowman, of the Department of Psychology, read and criticised constructively Chapters V, VI, VII, and VIII; Professor Anna I. Miller, of the Department of English, read and made helpful comments on Chapter XI. Professor Annette B. Hopkins and Professor Harry Torsey Baker, also of the Department of English, gave me encouragement and advice at the beginning of my undertaking. To all these friends I render most hearty thanks. My greatest indebtedness, both for helpful criticism and for encouragement, is expressed in the Dedication.

ELIZABETH NITCHIE.

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THE CRITICISM OF LITERATURE

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CHAPTER I

CRITICISM AND THE CRITIC

THE history of literary criticism shows that there have been two departments of criticism, theory and practice. Until the seventeenth century, however, we look almost in vain for critical accounts of individual books and authors. There was in the ancient world an occasional critic like Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who wrote a series of comments on Greek authors, or Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople in the ninth century, whom Saintsbury calls the patriarch of book reviewers.¹ Comments here and there in letters or in the course of treatises on critical theory are to be found, but their sum is very small. On the other hand, there are many systems of Poetics, as they were called, such as those of Aristotle, Horace, and Boileau, to cite three authors whose influence upon critical theory was very great. These make two attempts: first, to define literature, or usually, as the name suggests, poetry, for prose as an art form was of comparatively late development; second, to construct rules for the composition of epic, tragedy, and comedy. By implication, of course, standards are set up for good epic,

¹ *A History of Criticism*, Vol. I, p. 184. Photius wrote *Bibliotheca*, which purports to be an account of 280 authors whose works he had recently read.

tragedy, and comedy, and a foundation is laid for the practice of criticism. These systems of poetic theory, although they seem at first sight to be dogmatic, are really inductive in their origin. Aristotle, for example, the earliest formulator of rules for writing, based those rules on the practice of the great writers of Greece. Since the poems of Homer had beginning, middle, and end, so must all epic poems. The inherent intelligence and good sense of the critic, however, led him to analyze the great works of art, which had been proved great by their long continued power to appeal, and understand those principles on which genius had created drama or poem. These principles Aristotle discussed and explained and developed, and so built up a body of critical theory to serve as a guide for future writers and future readers of literature.

To these principles that were based primarily upon practice, later writers of Poetics, like Horace and Boileau, added certain other rules, such as the division of a play into five acts or the observance of the unity of time, which had their real origin in theory. So, by the time of the Renaissance and during it, we find a large body of dogmatic theory controlling or attempting to control both creation and criticism. That theory was, of course, strictly limited, because it was based on a system that regarded Greek drama and poetry as the final word in literature, and because, even in its later forms, it often took practically no notice of such new types as the romance and the lyric, that had sprung up or developed into importance in the intervening centuries. It controlled criticism far more than it did creation, because criticism, being more intellectual, is more easily held in leash. Consequently, although we have in England in the sixteenth century a Shakespeare unfettered by the unities,

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we are not surprised to find in the next century critics who are calling him an "irregular genius," a genius, to be sure, but one who violates many of the rules laid down by the ancients.

This dogmatic and judicial critical theory was a great curb upon the practice of criticism. When critics began, as they did with the rise of periodical literature, to write reviews of individual plays or poems, they found their hands tied. Thus Addison "examines" *Paradise Lost* by inquiring whether, in all the respects of fable, characters, sentiment, and language, it conforms to the rules for epic poetry. Dryden "examines" *The Silent Woman*, and calls it the most perfect of Jonson's plays, because it observes the rules for comedy. But any critic who is worthy of the name is bound to free at least a few fingers from the restrictions of too narrow theory. It is with congratulation and pleasure that we discover, sometimes embedded in classical criticism, sometimes standing boldly by themselves, individualistic appreciations of works of art or authors or styles, such as Sidney's famous passage on *Chevy Chase*, or Dryden's masterly interpretation of the greatness of Shakespeare or Chaucer, or Addison's essay on *The Fairy Way of Writing*, or Dr. Johnson's scattered comments on the imagination.

With the coming of the romantic movement and its emphasis on the individual and on history, critical theory itself began to break its bonds. The revolt of critical writing against neo-classic restraint accompanied that of creative writing. Individual response to a work of art took the place of the narrow standards of the Poetics, and critics began to consider the time in which a book was written and the circumstances under which it was composed, and to judge it accordingly. It was no longer necessary for writing to conform to the types discussed by

Aristotle, Horace, and Boileau or to follow exactly their rules for composition to gain a favorable hearing. Shakespeare's plays and chivalric romance, for instance, which violated the rules, met with new appreciation. With the growth of periodicals, reviews of new books or essays on old ones became frequent, and these reviews showed, as the years went on, an increasing freedom from rules and a greater variety of critical methods and principles. History and philosophy, æsthetics and hedonism, all sorts of new movements in thought and life, had their influence. Hence, while it is simple enough to characterize in broad terms the criticism of the Renaissance or of the neo-classic period, it is virtually impossible to reduce the criticism of the nineteenth century to a formula or creed of any kind. And today, with terms like impressionism, appreciative criticism, science, æsthetics, in the air, the reader becomes bewildered, and looks, often in vain, for a guide. Each school of critical thought in turn sounds plausible. Perhaps the way out of the maze is most easily found by avoiding the pitfall of too much terminology, not caring whether we are impressionistic or judicial critics, but looking at the literature itself. By combining the impression it makes upon us individually with what men have said great literature should be and do, by analyzing it and comparing it with other works that we feel are great, by noting our responses to both form and content, we may arrive at some definite judgment of the value of a certain book, its value, not only to ourselves but to the world. And that, after all, is criticism.

But before we embark on this sea, to work out our own chart as we go, we must throw overboard certain rosy hopes with which we have set sail. We must not think that it is possible for us to settle here and now all the

questions of criticism. If we could, the critical millennium would be here, the critical man would be perfect, and there would be no progress left to make. History has shown us that literature and literary standards change with succeeding periods in the development of man's thought; it shows us too that criticism changes and must change to adapt itself to the alterations in literature. It also makes manifest the fact that there are certain problems that have been discussed since the beginning of critical thinking, are still being discussed, and will always be discussed as long as men talk about the product of the pen or the typewriter or whatever in future ages takes the place of the typewriter. What are the proper subjects for poetry? What constitutes immorality in literature or is literature quite unmoral? Where is the dividing line between poetry and prose? What are the merits of meter and rhyme? These questions put up their heads in every generation; sometimes they are tricked out in modern ornaments, so that they look new, but the features are the same. They can never be permanently settled for the whole world. It is impossible to settle them satisfactorily even for a generation.

We come, then, to a definition of criticism. The word itself comes from the Greek verb *κρίνειν*, to judge or to discern. Criticism is an act of judgment, and the literary critic is a literary judge. The analogy, although it cannot be pressed too far, is suggestive. The prisoner at the bar is the book; the evidence is what can be proved in regard to its value to the world. The jury is composed of the critic's heart and head, his musical sense, his imagination,—all the faculties that are appealed to by literature. They are to bring in a verdict of guilty or not guilty, worthy to live or fit only to die. But literary judgment is not merely a decision between two alterna-

tives. If the verdict is "Guilty," the judge must determine the extent of the punishment: shall the book be consigned to the scrap heap immediately or shall it be allowed a certain lease of life? Shall it be shut up forever in the archives of the curious or frequent the company of a small group of men or be allowed, as long as it lives, to roam the world at large, with entry everywhere? And if the verdict is "Not guilty,"—here, perhaps, our analogy breaks down—then the judge must determine the nature of the reward; he deals not merely, —not mainly—with punishment. Sometimes the jury will disagree; the head will vote for acquittal, the heart for punishment; the visual imagination will approve, the auditory will condemn. Then the final decision rests with the judge on the basis of the evidence presented, the opinions of the jurymen, and the body of law on which all judicial opinions rest. What is the equivalent of that body of law? May it not be, not rules, but principles of right literary conduct as formulated from the innumerable cases of Books vs. Readers through the centuries?

There are those who claim that there can be no standards set up for the purpose of judging art. Such objectors usually belong to the so-called impressionistic school of criticism. Pietro Aretino, for instance, a sixteenth century critic, said that there was no rule except the whim of genius, no standard of judgment beyond individual taste.² And Anatole France defines the good critic as the man "who relates the adventures of his soul among masterpieces."³ The result of such a process is impressionism, not judgment. In the impressionistic criticism of a great writer and thinker, we may find literature of a high

² Referred to by Spingarn, *Creative Criticism*, p. 10.

³ *La Vie Littéraire*, 33rd ed. (Paris, Calmann Lévy), Vol. I, p. iii.

order. We listen gladly to Anatole France relating the adventures of his soul among masterpieces,—but for the beauty of the writing and the gift of the personality of the writer more than for the essential value of the literary judgments. His review of *The History of the People of Israel*, for example, is of biographical and personal interest rather than of critical importance. For the merely good critic, such as all but the very few are, personal feelings alone are unsafe guides. “I think the couplet . . . excellent,” said Boswell. “Sir,” replied Dr. Johnson, “you may think it excellent, but that does not make it so.”⁴

And if we accept these theories, we must still ask what genius is, what constitutes taste, and how we shall know what masterpieces are. It is often necessary, too, for the critic to go adventuring among works whose literary rank has not yet been determined, and to decide for himself and for the benefit of the public whether they are masterpieces or not. What then? This very practical and useful department of criticism, which is run largely by individual readers who never find their way into print, by publishers’ readers whose duty it is to pass on manuscripts submitted to their firms, and by the great body of periodical reviewers, is not provided for by Anatole France’s definition. Perhaps he would not call them “good critics.” Perhaps he would be right. But it is these critics rather than Anatole France and his compeers who are looking for help and suggestions.

There is another group of critics who would regard their work as a science. William Dean Howells said, in his little book on *Criticism and Fiction*, that it is the business of the critic “to classify and analyze the fruits

⁴ Newton, A. Edward, *Doctor Johnson* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1923), p. 14.

of the human mind very much as the naturalist classifies the objects of his study, rather than to praise or blame them, . . . to identify the species and then explain how and where the specimen is imperfect and irregular.”⁵ But this process is merely that of pasting labels. Even the scientist is not content with analysis and classification and the noting of irregularities; he draws conclusions. How much more, then, the critic, who is dealing, not with inert matter, but with books, “that do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are.” He cannot cultivate the impersonality of the scientist. The impressionistic critic is nearer to true criticism than the scientific.

Critics of another school find their answer to the question of the proper method of criticism in æsthetics. “The true end of criticism, therefore,” says Mrs. Puffer-Howe, “is to tell us whence and why the charm of a work of art.” They wish to “disengage, to explain, to measure, and to certify” that charm.⁶ They turn their attention solely to the beauty of a work of art, and they are concerned, in themselves, only with their sense of beauty. Like the impressionists, they are limited. They consider only a part of the total book or poem, but they speak as if that were the whole. Of course beauty is more than skin deep for them, and consists of something far more than mere beauty of form. But the layman finds it confusing and difficult to know just what beauty is, and he feels the need of something more definite than their systems of æsthetics as a guide. The sense of beauty is only a part of the jury in the critical court.

The so-called appreciative critics take in a wider field

* Pp. 30-31. Copyright 1891 by Harper and Brothers; copyright 1918 by William Dean Howells.

⁶ Puffer, *The Psychology of Beauty*, p. 25.

than any of these other schools. They unite some of the ideas of the scientific criticism with some of those of impressionism. They believe, in the words of one of their number, that criticism cannot "properly confine itself to the record of a momentary shiver across a single set of possibly degenerate nerves."⁷ Thus they dispose of the impressionists. On the other hand, although they use some of the methods of the scientists, gathering data about their subject, analyzing, classifying, and comparing, they do not stop with these processes, but utilize this material for their own purposes. But they do not use it for the purpose of explaining or judging. The critic's "aim is primarily not to explain and not to judge or dogmatize, but to enjoy; to realize the manifold charm the work of art has gathered into itself from all sources, and to interpret this charm imaginatively to the men of his own day and generation."⁸

All this welter and confusion of schools and terms and methods (and there are others still⁹), is the result of the modern attempt to get free from the Aristotelian type of dogmatic judicial criticism, whose limitations we have already seen. The errors resultant upon the too strict application of Aristotle's theory to later literature were so glaring, the fluctuations of literary taste were so obvious, that there came a natural revulsion against all standards. Yet, as a matter of fact, standards have not been entirely abandoned. Moulton,¹⁰ pointing out the wholesome change from traditional to modern criticism, includes in his summary of modern criticism four exist-

⁷ Gates, *Studies and Appreciations*, p. 214.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 233-234.

⁹ For example, the so-called sociological school, of which V. F. Calverton is a good example. See his *Sex Expression in Literature and The Newer Spirit*. There is also the "expressionistic" theory of Spingarn, based upon the æsthetic system of Croce. See his *Creative Criticism*.

¹⁰ *The Modern Study of Literature*, pp. 221-229.

ing types: inductive (which examines a work of literature for classification and interpretation), speculative (which works toward a theory and philosophy of literature), judicial (which applies assumed principles to the assaying of literature), and free or subjective (which should be regarded as independent literature itself). It will be noted that he makes judicial criticism, that bugaboo of many modern critics, take its place beside such modern schools as the inductive and the subjective, or, as we have named them, the scientific and the impressionistic. Of course he must have his own preference: he regards inductive criticism as the basis of the other three. But here the lion actually does lie down with the lamb; the judicial process, which "applies assumed principles to the assaying of literature," is considered a necessary part of modern criticism.

It appears possible to go even further than this. Criticism seems a bigger thing than any one of the schools would have us believe. By all means let us gather data, let us analyze and classify; by all means let us disengage the æsthetic charm; by all means let us enjoy and interpret that charm; by all means let us go adventuring among masterpieces and relate those adventures to others. But also, by all means, let us find out, if we can, whether they have been masterpieces that our souls have been with, whether our enjoyment is based on valid grounds and whether we are interpreting something that is worth while, whether the æsthetic appeal is merely that of a lily in the hand of a decadent, whether our data have been gathered to any worth while purpose. And, seemingly, the only way to do all these things is to build up for ourselves some body of principles that may serve us for a guide. There is no reason why such a guide should prevent us from investigating, from enlarging our taste in

readiness to welcome new literary forms, from adjusting ourselves to the changes in literature as they come. To return to our figure of the judge, we must realize that the body of law on which we depend must be very simple, very flexible. Even constitutions may be amended, new statutes may be written on the books, outworn laws may be abrogated. And so it is with the literary canon.

If this is true, then the process of criticism involves the understanding of a book, the appreciation of it, the enjoyment of it if it proves worth enjoying, and the determination of our judgment as to its value. This large conception of criticism lays a tremendous responsibility upon the critic. It at once rules out the popular conception of criticism as fault-finding. There is a feeling, stronger than we perhaps realize, among inexperienced critics, that the proper way to begin to criticise is to point out the bad qualities. There is even a confusion between the terms criticism and satire: a student asked to discuss the critical work of Dryden will cite his attacks upon Shadwell rather than his appreciation of Chaucer. If he is allowed to cling to this idea of destructive criticism, the inexperienced critic is apt to grow captious. But the good critic looks first for the virtues of a book. In evaluating a work of art he must take note of faults as he sees them; the honest critic can do no less. But that notice will be not the main object, unless the book is utterly bad. Coleridge has a sage word on this subject: "To the young I would remark that it is always unwise to judge of anything by its defects: the first attempt ought to be to discover its excellences." ¹¹

An examination of the processes involved in this larger criticism will serve to dispel also another idea, that

¹¹ *Lectures on Shakespeare* (Bohn Standard Edition, George Bell and Sons), p. 73.

analysis spoils a work of art, as a child often ruins a watch by his desire to find out what makes the wheels go round. The critic who takes upon himself the performance of all the processes suggested above, will see at once that critical analysis is a very different thing from the child's unskilled destruction of a piece of delicate mechanism. It is more nearly akin to the work of the watch-maker, who takes the watch apart to see what is wrong with it, that he may put it together again. But this analogy suggests destructive criticism again rather than constructive. A better figure is that used by Mr. Walter de la Mare in a lecture on literary craftsmanship delivered in Baltimore in 1924.¹² He said that analyzing a poem was like pulling a daisy to pieces. In each, if you pull, not wantonly and destructively, but gently and with the desire to learn, you discover the beauty and perfection of the several parts. Each petal of the daisy is a flower in itself; each phrase—each word—of the poem may be a lyric in itself. The difference between the two processes is that although you can never put the daisy together again, you may have the poem in its entire loveliness as many times as you wish to return to it. And you will re-read the poem after analysis with a new reverence for the whole into which each beautiful part so exquisitely fits. The purpose of analysis, then, which is a part of the scientific process in criticism, is not to leave the work of art in fragments, but to win thereby a truer appreciation of its composite charm and to arrive at a juster estimate of its ultimate value.

The formulation of an idea of the nature of criticism and the processes involved in it, brings us next to a consideration of the materials with which the critic works. His main material is, of course, the book or the poem it-

¹² Quoted by permission of Mr. de la Mare.

self, and in the last analysis his criticism will be of the book or poem. But there are a number of fields which he can explore that will yield him interesting and important discoveries auxiliary to his main purpose. Some authorities believe that they do not properly belong to *literary* criticism. It is true that they do not, in the strictest sense of the term, and a brief discussion of them here must suffice. But it is also true that they may prove valuable aids to the appreciation and evaluation of the book or poem because of the light they throw on both content and form. A knowledge of the life or the mind of the author, of the social and historical background and importance of a book will not alter one whit the value of that book; a great book is "not of an age but for all time." But such knowledge may greatly increase our understanding and our consequent appreciation of that value. And we must realize that literature is, to a very great degree, the product of the personality and the social environment of its creators.

One of the first things to interest us when we read a book, aside from the book itself, is the life of the author, especially in so far as it throws light on the book we are reading. It may do this in many ways. It is valuable and interesting to know where, in the development of the literary career of the author, our book stands. It will help us to appreciate it more intelligently, although it will not in the least alter its value, if we know that it comes early or late in that development. In the first instance, we shall forgive its crudities and marvel at the signs of promise, perhaps, where we might otherwise condemn because of the preponderance of the crudities. A knowledge of the heredity and the bitter experiences of Byron will help to explain much of his pose of melancholy and cynicism. No man's literary work should be judged

by his life; in fact, frequently his literary work is the product of the best of him. But a realization that much in Byron's life was insincere will help us to see that what often repels us in the midst of his most gorgeous poetry is his habitual pose. Similarly a study of Burns' checkered career, with its swift succession of brief but intense loves, will reveal the reason why he is one of the greatest of love lyrists: each song comes straight from his heart out of the intensity of each brief experience.

Recently there have been a number of books written with the purpose of interpreting the psychology of certain authors. Psycho-analysis of the dead, as of the living, may be carried to absurd extremes. But the idea that underlies such studies as *The Psychology of the Poet Shelley* is a sound one. Good biographies of literary men emphasize mental development at least fully as much as external events. This is true of such books as Amy Lowell's *John Keats* or S. Foster Damon's *William Blake*. Indeed, *Prometheus Unbound* and the *Ode to a Nightingale* and *The Book of Thel* yield up to us new values as our understanding of the minds that made them grows. The beauty of content and form comes to us with new power when more amply revealed by the fuller comprehension of the meaning and purpose behind it.

It is well, then, for the critic to know the biography and the psychology of the author. It is also well for him to know the historical and social background of the book. That last phrase may be taken in two different senses. The understanding of the background of the book itself is involved in the study of the biography of the author. That is important. It is also valuable to know the social and historical background of the story as well as that of the book. For example, fuller appreciation of

George Eliot's *Romola* will come to those who know something both of Savonarola's Florence and of the development of thought in the middle of the nineteenth century. Scott's *Ivanhoe* will mean more to the reader who is familiar with Norman England and the Romantic Movement. Many of the beauties of *Paradise Lost* will be hidden from those who are not versed in Biblical and classical story and who do not know the Puritanism and the humanism of the seventeenth century. *Paradise Lost* and *Absalom and Achitophel* and *The Rape of the Lock* will not be any less great as poems if we are ignorant of the historical and social circumstances that gave them birth; they will only be less great for us, and we shall be so much poorer critics. Ours is the loss, not theirs. The enrichment and enlargement of our enjoyment is worth any effort that may be necessary.

These approaches to critical appreciation of literature are interesting and helpful roads to travel. They are especially important when the book to be considered belongs to an earlier period, particularly when we are concerned with its thought or its form. Human emotions remain much the same throughout the centuries, but human ideas and æsthetic taste are constantly changing. Hence the expression of an outworn theology, as in *Paradise Lost*, or the results of an alien taste in literary form, as in the work of Dryden and Pope, may obscure for the uninformed modern reader the real beauties inherent in the poetry. The study of the history of thought may illuminate them. The approaches are not un-useful in evaluating contemporary work as well, especially if that work reflects a certain movement in thought or artistic theory, such as Freudian psychology or imagism, or if it gives a picture of an unfamiliar social environment.

But none of these approaches should be overworked, and it should always be remembered that the main object of criticism is the book, its content and its form. Too little of our study of literature today in schools and colleges is concerned with the literature itself. Scholarship and teaching too frequently degenerate into the amassing and inculcation of information about books and their authors, and fail to realize and make clear that such information is of value mainly as it helps us to understand, appreciate, and enjoy.¹³

With as large an equipment then as possible of knowledge about the life and mind of the author and about the historical and social background of the book, the critic will turn to the content and form of the book for his real work of evaluation and judgment. What he demands from a book will be determined by his definition of literature. As we shall see in the next chapter, we cannot accept as final proof any of the external indications of literary value, such as survival or wideness of appeal; we look for the real values in the book itself. As far as content is concerned, we ask that the author shall have something to say that is worth saying, and the values of content seem to fall into three large classes, intellectual, ethical, and emotional. About the relative importance of these values, and even about the necessity of including all or any of them, there will be differences of opinion. These matters belong, however, to later chapters. There will be less disagreement in regard to the value of the expression of the book, the imaginative power which enables the writer by means of treatment, construction, and style to transmit to the reader those ex-

¹³ The familiar histories of literature may be partially responsible for this, especially in high school teaching. They inevitably—and rightly—combine biographical and historical information with a slight amount of criticism.

periences which he feels are worth setting down in writing. Again there may be differences of opinion as to the relative importance of the value of content and the value of expression; to some, the latter is the be-all and the end-all of criticism. But in order to cover comprehensively the whole of criticism, all these matters must be considered, and careful consideration should bring us to the conclusion that all are important, although undoubtedly not equally so. The determination of the nature and the relative importance of these values is one of the tasks that lie before us.

The relation of criticism to other forms of writing is an interesting problem. Someone has maliciously said that a critic is a creative writer who has failed. This statement has the modicum of truth in it that such generalizations usually have. Pope puts it:

Some have at first for Wits, then Poets pass'd;
Turn'd Critics next, and prov'd plain Fools at last.

But we are speaking of good critics, not those who "turn Critics in their own defence." Can the old distinction between criticism and creation be maintained, or should criticism itself be called creative? Is it an art or a science? Is the critic himself an artist or merely the manager or producer who introduces the artist and his work to the public. Writers vary in their answers to these questions. Mr. Mencken, for example, compares the function of the critic with that of a catalyzer in chemistry.¹⁴ Amiel says, "Criticism is above all a gift, an intuition, a matter of tact and *flair*; it cannot be taught or demonstrated,—it is an art."¹⁵ Howells, on the other hand, as we have

¹⁴ "Criticism of Criticism of Criticism," *Prejudices*, First Series, pp. 20-21.

¹⁵ *Journal*, translated by Mrs. Humphrey Ward, 2nd edition (London, Macmillan, 1915), p. 250.

seen, compares the work of the critic with that of the scientist who classifies and analyzes. Alfred Kerr, in *Das Neue Drama*, said, "The true critic is ever a poet, a creator."¹⁶ Mr. Spingarn has introduced a term, "creative criticism," which shows on which side of the dispute he stands: his essay on "The New Criticism" is an eloquent justification of the placing of criticism side by side with the work of the novelist or the poet. "The æsthetic critic," he claims, "in his moments of highest power, rises to heights where he is at one with the creator whom he is interpreting."¹⁷ But Mr. Galsworthy says that the critic "is absolutely tied to the terms of the work that he is interpreting, whereas the very essence of creation is that roving, gathering, discovering process of mind and spirit which goes before the commencement of a work of art."¹⁸ And John Gould Fletcher once said that criticism was a reversal of the successful experiment which produced the work of art itself.

Again the way out of this wilderness seems to be the middle road. There is something of the scientist certainly in the critic, if our analysis of the critical process is correct, something of the investigator and the gatherer of facts. But (just as there is in the great scientist, as a matter of fact) there is something of the creator also, even in the most judicial of critics. No one could deny that the great impressionistic critic, like Anatole France, is a creator. But even those who do not belong to that school should be artists. In order to understand and feel and enjoy the charm of a work of art, one must have something of the temperament that responds to beauty as the

¹⁶ Quoted in Lewisohn, *A Modern Book of Criticism*, p. 82.

¹⁷ *Creative Criticism*, p. 138.

¹⁸ Quoted by Spingarn in Appendix to *Creative Criticism*, p. 133. See also "Vague Thoughts on Art," in *The Inn of Tranquillity* (Scribner, 1926), pp. 268-269.

artist's soul responds. Someone has said that every man who enjoys poetry is himself a poet. And in order to interpret to the world the work of art which he has enjoyed, he must have something of the power of expression which belongs to the artist; otherwise his criticism would be a dead thing, and all the raptures of his own experience would be useless to any but himself. "To interpret this charm imaginatively," it will be remembered, was the second part of the function of the critic as set forth by the spokesman of the appreciative school.¹⁹

This scientific-creative critic is perhaps a superman. Certainly he must be endowed with a large equipment of characteristics, knowledges, and powers. Let us see what this ideal critic must be like, and then remember, for our own comfort, that no man is perfect and that a man's reach should exceed his grasp. The road to good criticism is no easy one. Centuries ago Longinus said, "For the judgment of literature is the final aftergrowth of much endeavor."²⁰

It is a temptation, in writing of the characteristics of the good critic, to quote long passages from Pope, who compressed into the couplets of his *Essay on Criticism* much practical and sensible advice that is just as valid today as it was in the eighteenth century. His summary is especially good and comprehensive, and will serve as an introduction.

But where's the man who counsel can bestow,
Still pleas'd to teach, and yet not proud to know?
Unbiass'd or by favour or by spite;
Not dully prepossess'd nor blindly right;
Tho' learn'd, well bred; and tho' well bred sincere;
Modestly bold, and humanly severe:
Who to a friend his faults can freely show,

¹⁹ See p. 9.

²⁰ *On the Sublime*, Sec. VI.

And gladly praise the merit of a foe;
Blest with a taste exact, yet unconfin'd;
A knowledge both of books and human-kind;
Gen'rous converse; a soul exempt from pride;
And love to praise, with reason on his side?

Although allowances must be made, owing to the fact that the *Essay* was written in the height of the neo-classic period, the whole poem should be read by all

who seek to give and merit fame,
And justly bear a Critic's noble name.

The great trilogy of characteristics that the ideal critic should possess are tolerance, sympathy, and sincerity, and the greatest of these is sincerity. Many other sins may be forgiven a critic or at least condoned if he means what he says; but insincerity is the unpardonable sin. Not many are consciously and of fell intent insincere, although it is possible that the critic may have an axe to grind that will influence his review. Usually, however, the insincerity is unconscious and unintentional. Critics are strongly inclined to follow the crowd; many a book, having been given a start toward popularity by the praise of one authoritative review, is pushed on by successive laudatory criticisms into the position of a best seller. If a truly honest critic ventures to dissent, his voice is drowned by a chorus of praise. And the reader, who is an unofficial critic, feels, if he has not strong convictions and a strong critical sense of his own, that it is the proper thing for him too to like and praise the book. Even though he has some doubts about the goodness of the book, he may feel that it is not "the thing" to condemn it. "Everybody" likes it; therefore he should like it whether he does or not. By such false modesty about our own critical powers, and such fears of being out of the fashion, is the best seller sometimes made. In the

estimation both of recent books and of the "classics," it is very difficult to avoid being influenced by what other and older critics have said.

A great name on a title page will predispose us to favorable criticism and a name associated with poor work will make us feel that no good can ever come out of Nazareth. It is true, however, that Homer sometimes nods, and that even Bavius may produce a single masterpiece. Our critical senses must be alert to catch the nodding and the spurt of genius. It is no sacrilege to condemn a poem by Tennyson or Shelley or Masfield; it may be a wholesome purging of the altar so that the flame of our worship will burn the brighter. Undiscriminating bardolatry, as George Bernard Shaw calls it in the case of Shakespeare, is simply unintelligent.

Another pose that is less venial than that of following the crowd, because it comes from less fundamentally honest motives, is that of being different, of holding oneself aloof from *οἱ πολλοί*. The professional critic is apt to err in this respect, and the reader, if he has desires to be classed among the intelligentsia, will follow his lead. He praises a book, not because the many admire it, but because the intellectual few have stamped it with their approval. A liking for caviare is a sign of a highly cultivated taste; ergo, we will pretend to like caviare whether we appreciate it truly or not. "To be original and individual," said a young critic once, "is to be different from other people." It is not; it is to be independent of the opinions of other people, be they the majority or the minority.

The critic should be, first of all, sincere; in the second place, he should be tolerant. The tolerant man is the truly liberal man, and the liberal is tolerant. The conservative and the radical are equally intolerant: one

can see no good in what is new, the other finds no reason for survival in the old. The liberal and tolerant man, on the other hand, while clinging to the old, is ready to welcome any innovation that seems likely to mark progress. His view of literature is too wide, his sympathies are too catholic to allow him to reject a book or a theory just because he has seen it for a long time or never seen its like before.

The tolerant critic is free from prejudice on the score of other things beside youth and age. He is not one of those described in the couplet,

Some, valuing those of their own side or mind,
Still make themselves the measure of mankind.

Said Stuart P. Sherman, "If the author's apparent likes and dislikes with reference to things in general harmonize pretty well with his own, he [i.e., the average man] feels fortified and encouraged, and declares that it is a 'good book.'"²¹ This is true not only of the average man but of the average critic. Prejudices beset us on every side when we turn to the judging of a book: moral and ethical prejudices that prevent us from seeing the broader ethical implications of a book that by its frankness of speech may offend our preconceived notions of what constitutes good taste; prejudices due to our early literary training that make us, as has been said before, think that anything written by a great man must needs be great; prejudices due to our environment, our nationality, our social status, our occupation, to all the hundred and one things that go to make up what we call our mind.²² The critic must, as far as is humanly possible,

²¹ "Unprintable," *Atlantic Monthly*, July, 1923. Reprinted in *Points of View*. See p. 68.

²² Many instances of bias due to nationality were seen in the reviews of books written during the Great War.

divest himself of them. As Carlyle said, following Goethe, and as many other writers have repeated after him, "First we must have made plain to ourselves what the poet's aim really and truly was, how the task he had to do stood before his own eye, and how far, with such means as it afforded him, he has fulfilled it."²³ And a contemporary writer phrases it, "The critic's first job is to name what our writers are doing. . . . Having named, it is time to drop prejudice, such as 'I like other methods, other subjects, better,' and taking the author on his own terms discuss the success or failure of what he himself has actually set out to accomplish."²⁴ It was Howells' protest against the critic who would use tomahawk and scalping-knife on all writers who are not of his opinion that led him to his comparison of the critic with the scientist.

All this, however, is not to say that the critic is to have no strong convictions of his own. It merely means that those convictions are to take the form of judgments, not pre-judgments. Absolute impartiality and impersonality are impossible for the critic, or, even if possible, are as reprehensible as personal prejudice. The review that seesaws from praise to blame, whose every sentence has a "but" in the middle of it, leaves the reader in a confusion as to the merits of the book that is less helpful than his ignorance before he read the criticism. The vitriolic attacks of a Jeffrey are almost preferable. The good critic will approach his task with an open mind, and will judge with tolerance. He must consider both sides of the case. But he can scarcely take up a book without personal bias and he surely cannot read it through

²³ "Goethe," in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, Vol. I, p. 260.

²⁴ Editorial, "Football and Criticism," in *Literary Review*, Nov. 3, 1923.

without personal feeling. Healthy and helpful criticism will be sure of itself, will have the courage of its convictions, will set forth praise and censure with fairness to both the virtues and the faults of a book but with the proper emphasis on one or the other, and will do it with a vigor that will help others to judge.

Fair and just criticism depends also upon a sympathetic understanding of the purpose of the author. It is necessary for the critic to put himself, as far as possible, in sympathy with the writer before he presumes to estimate the value of his accomplishment. We all know what lack of sympathy did in the case of a new writer, like John Keats; it produced such a review as the infamous one in the *Quarterly*. We all know too what lack of sympathy may do in the case of work that belongs to an older time, how it may keep us from estimating properly a *MacFlecknoe* or an *Evelina*. A sympathetic reviewer is not necessarily a favorable or gentle one; he is one who, as the literal meaning of the word indicates, feels with the author, penetrates to the center of his idea and purpose, and, having done so, evaluates that idea or purpose and measures the success or failure of its accomplishment.

Such sympathy must be based on a firm foundation of knowledge. As has already been said, familiarity with the biography and psychology of the author and with the social and historical background of the book is of great value to the reader who would truly judge that book. Scholarship, therefore, is a necessary part of the equipment of the critic. We recognize without hesitation that it is requisite for the critic of scholarly work; we are less likely to think of it as necessary for the reviewer of *belles lettres*. Our ideal critic, however, will possess it and use it, and will remember that "a little

learning is a dangerous thing." The true scholar is always humble; the good critic will never presume to pronounce judgment *ex cathedra* on the basis of insufficient knowledge.

On the other hand, the good critic will not be Pope's

bookful blockhead ignorantly read,
With loads of learned lumber in his head,

but he will have "a knowledge both of books and human kind." The ill effects of scholarship over-emphasized—dryness and removal from human life—may be avoided if the critic has in addition to his learning a broad and a rich experience in human life. Literature is the product of human experience; the true response to it will come out of human experience. Books, if rightly read, will do much to enlarge that experience. A person who desires to know human nature will find much help in the study of the ways in which the great novelists and dramatists have portrayed the men and women whom they knew so well. And the resulting increase in ability to understand life will in turn aid in the criticism of other books.

This foundation of knowledge and experience belongs to the scientific half of the ideal critic. It must be remembered that he is creative too, and therefore must share with the author some of the possessions of the creative writer. It stands to reason that if he is to estimate works in which imagination has had a share, he himself must have imagination.²⁵ The critic must, like the author, have "a disposition to be affected more than any other men by absent things as if they were present."²⁶ That disposition need not be so strong as in the

²⁵ Such terms as this will be discussed and defined later. But we all have a working knowledge, although it may be vague, of what we mean by imagination and beauty, for instance.

²⁶ Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800.

author, for the critic is helped by the words of the writer to see what the latter has already conjured up. But in general, the keener the critic's imagination, the deeper his sympathetic understanding of literature and the better his judgment.

The critic must also have a sense of beauty, with all that that implies. He must be responsive to the varied beauties of ideas, of human character, of images, of verbal harmonies. He must be able to see harmonies and beauty in forms old and new; his sense of beauty must be, not a conventional and hidebound thing, but as free and independent as is his judgment of values, and as sincere. "When people . . . are incapable," says Santayana, "of finding pictures except in frames or beauties except in the great masters, we may justly suspect that they are parrots, and that their verbal and historical knowledge covers a natural lack of æsthetic sense."²⁷

So far we have been speaking of those qualities and powers which the critic must have in order to be able to judge correctly and fairly a work of literature. He must also have the power of expressing his judgments in order that he may be that interpreter who will "heighten the reader's conscious life by increasing his capacity to read."²⁸ Critical writing itself, both because of its utilitarian purpose and because it partakes of the nature of an art, must be submitted to severe criticism.

"Vigor, of course, not correctness," said Carl Van Doren, "is the mark of good critical, as it is the mark of good creative writing."²⁹ This rather sweeping statement seems to imply more than is perhaps intended. Correctness without vigor, to be sure, has little life; but vigor

²⁷ *The Sense of Beauty* (Scribner, [1896]), p. 80.

²⁸ Buck, *The Social Criticism of Literature*, p. 54.

²⁹ "Books and the Nation," *The Nation*, July 1, 1925, p. 12.

without correctness may be worse than useless. The good critic will combine accuracy and strength in a manner of expression that will both inform and inspire.

Nor will the critic allow vigor to interfere with clarity. If he is to stand, in Carlyle's words, "like an interpreter between the inspired and the uninspired; between the prophet and those who hear the melody of his words, and catch some glimpse of their material meaning, but understand not their deeper import," then his style must certainly be clear. That clarity will depend not only on the logical arrangement of ideas and the pellucid quality of the vocabulary, but also on the definiteness of the ideas themselves. The critic must never be hazy in his own mind, and he must never be vague and general in expression. Specific words are the index of a clear mind, and they are the most helpful means by which the reader comes to an understanding of the qualities of the work that is being criticised. Instances that will show the absurdity and unavailingness of the general criticism might be found on far too many undergraduate examination papers. Here is the *reductio ad absurdum* of generalization, but it can be paralleled, in terms not quite so crude, in our poorer published reviews, and certainly in much of our conversation. The critic will never be heard for his much speaking. He will be heard for his assured, accurate, clear, and definite speaking.

He will also be heard for the freshness of his phrasing. There are certain critical words and phrases which, like the trite and conventional diction of narrative and description, have been done to death. Such a term as *colorful*, for instance, should be avoided, at any rate by the inexperienced critic. An awkward word at best, it has been used to cover so many figurative meanings of *color* that it has almost lost its significance. And yet it seems

a useful word; it sounds like good, specific criticism. But if it is examined, it will be found in perhaps five cases out of ten to be as vague as any word could possibly be. Turn the pages of almost any weekly review, and count the number of times it is used; any word so overworked inevitably becomes colorless.³⁰ Another word that lacks both freshness and definiteness is *poignant*. Joseph Warren Beach has pointed out how carelessly this word and others like it have been used in fiction;³¹ his remarks might apply to critical writing as well. *Poignant* means *piercing*, and should never be used except for something that literally or figuratively may be said to pierce. "Poignant pictures of life," then, in spite of its apt alliteration, itself presents such a confused visual image that it loses all value as a critical phrase. And what does a contemporary reviewer mean when she says that an author lets "poignance cloy to sweetness"? The more common, less easily misused adjectives, like *vivid* and *charming*, are also employed far too often for effect. And extravagant terms of praise have been so liberally distributed among the good and the mediocre and even the poor at the present day, that, as one essayist has remarked, we have no vocabulary in reserve against the advent of a Shakespeare or a Dante.³²

The graces of good creative writing, though not necessary to satisfactory critical writing, belong to the best examples of the art. Any artificial effort after such graces will interfere with the purpose of criticism, for it will obscure the intellectual point and will be an evidence of

³⁰ Dean Briggs of Harvard included it among the "words which need a rest." See Brown, R. W., *Dean Briggs* (Harper, 1926), p. 83.

³¹ "Proud Words" and "Sawing the Air," *Atlantic Monthly*, October and November, 1923.

³² Lynn, Margaret, "Concerning Reviewers of Sorts," *Atlantic Monthly*, August, 1926.

bad taste which will prejudice a reader against the judgment of the critic. But it is obvious that the greater writer is the greater critic, that the more exquisite his art of expression, the greater his power to stimulate the reader to intelligent appreciation, always provided that he does not forget what constitutes good criticism and does not allow himself to be carried far away from the material that he is interpreting into realms of his own creation. In such a case he may be a great writer, but he will be less great as a critic. The ideal critic will have both sides of his hyphenated nature balanced with each other; his creative powers will match his scientific, and both will combine to produce that being whose qualities Amiel thus summarized: "Competent learning, general cultivation, absolute probity, accuracy of general view, human sympathy and technical capacity,—how many things are necessary to the critic, without reckoning grace, delicacy, *savoir vivre*, and the gift of happy phrasemaking!"³³

Having set up this high ideal for criticism and the critic, we must turn next to the material with which they are concerned. We must consider the nature of literature and determine what qualities, what values we demand from it, and how we may decide whether those qualities and values are present. We shall approach our task with all modesty, realizing that it demands powers which, as a modern critic has said, "most of us moan to attain." And having built up a theory for ourselves, we shall turn to the task of practical criticism with a realization that no mortal can decide these questions for all people or for all time, but that, as Pope wittily said,

"Tis with our judgments as our watches, none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own.

³³ *Journal*, translated by Mrs. Humphrey Ward, 2nd edition (Macmillan, 1915), p. 251.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE AND THE AUTHOR

THE questions that arise in connection with the statements about criticism and the critic by Pietro Aretino and Anatole France are difficult ones to answer: What is genius? What are masterpieces? The critic, whether he is to record his impressions, or to enjoy and appreciate, or to judge and evaluate, must discover for himself some solution to these problems; he must determine what he expects to find in the nature of an author whom he calls great or even good, and what he means when he speaks of literature.

The words *author* and *literature* are both used very loosely. Technically, the author is the maker of any piece of writing, from the driest text book to the noblest poem. We have words to distinguish the good from the poor in poetry, for we know the difference immediately between a poet and a rhymers or versifier. We have even that word of contempt, *poetaster*. But the word *author* covers a multitude of vices and virtues, and we are helpless to indicate either vice or virtue except by the use of qualifying adjectives or phrases. It is obvious that here we must use the word *author* in the sense of a writer of genius or at least of talent, and so it must be understood in these pages.

The grading and ranking of authors was the favorite sport of many of the older critics. Joseph Warton, for instance, in his essay on *The Genius and Writings of Pope*, divides the English poets into four classes, naming

the writers whom he would dispose under each heading. Such a process, unwise as it may be critically, is easier than the attempt so often made to decide which is the greater of two writers. It is impossible to say authoritatively that Shelley is greater than Keats, or Thackeray than Dickens. Relative greatness depends on so many things, and will look so different to different men that a final answer to such a question can never be arrived at. There are even those who question the supreme position in which criticism has generally put Shakespeare. It is easy to say that Swinburne's harmonies and rhythms are more delicate and exquisite than those of Browning, and that Browning is a more profound and helpful thinker than Swinburne; but which is the greater poet, who shall decide? You or I may have an opinion that one quality or the other is more important, but neither of us may be able to convince the other. It is possible, however, to decide what qualities and characteristics make up the writer of genius, and then to determine whether an individual author possesses them in a greater or less degree. This recognition of the presence of certain characteristics in a writer, though it takes care and study, is a comparatively easy scientific process; the evaluation of those characteristics is a much more difficult matter.

As vague as *author* is the word *literature*. And reviewers use *masterpiece*, *perfect*, *greatest* so freely and carelessly that they lose all significance. If we were to believe the reviews, we have had in the last few years so many masterpieces that our age ought to surpass that of Elizabeth. A study of a volume of the *Book Review Digest* will convince anyone on this point. Book after book is hailed by the critics and advertised by its publishers as "the greatest novel of the year," or even as "the great American novel." In order, then, that criticism may have

meaning and usefulness, it must define as clearly as possible the significance of greatness in literature and point out the qualities that make up a masterpiece. The questions of genius in the author and greatness in the product are bound inextricably together, and a discussion of one involves the other.

The delimitations of literature are not easy to fix. We shall all agree, however, that a partial description of literature is that it is the record of experience. The questions of the nature and value of that experience and of the effectiveness and beauty of the record are the questions that cause the ultimate difficulty. Fundamentally, however, there seems no fault to be found with the statement that literature is the record of the experience of the writer. The reader approaches a book with the expectation of enlarging his own experience, of meeting new people, of becoming acquainted with new ideas, of learning about new countries, of finding new meanings and new beauties in familiar things, of rejoicing his senses with new æsthetic appeals. If readers in general are to secure this enlargement of experience from books, it follows that the authors must be men and women of larger experience, of greater sensitiveness than ordinary men. Wordsworth's description of the poet is true of the author: "What is a Poet? . . . He is a man speaking to men; a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; . . . who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him."¹ It is because his experiences are broader that the writer is impelled to set down those experiences for other men to read.

¹ Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800.

Wordsworth's old-fashioned word "sensibility" may be translated sensitiveness. Many of a writer's experiences come to him through the avenue of the senses. A sunset, a bird song has enriched his life; it may enrich the reader's too. That enrichment comes, however, not only from the mere physical experience of sight or hearing, but also from the sensitiveness of his soul which finds beauty and meaning in sight or sound. He is sensitive also to experiences that do not form, primarily, images of sight or sound, but pass directly to what, in older parlance, would have been called the mind and the heart. They stimulate a mental process or arouse an emotional response.

This sensitiveness is not developed in the same directions in all writers. The novelist and the dramatist respond chiefly to human action and human character, the essayist to ideas, the lyric poet to emotions and to sense impressions. In each case, however, the response is quicker and surer than that of the ordinary man, and the quickness and sureness of the response is part of the measure of his greatness. Not often will you find sensitiveness developed along many lines in one man. Of Shakespeare Dryden said in the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, "He was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul." Coleridge called him "myriad-minded." There have been other, lesser writers, versatile artists, whose souls have approximated comprehensiveness sufficiently to make them sensitive in several directions. Dryden himself wrote various kinds of poetry and excellent critical prose as well. When this happens, however, it is usually the case that the writer carries over from one kind of writing to the other, the same characteristics, the same "sensibilities." Dryden's intellectual keenness and critical temper are evident in his poems as well as in his prose. John

Masefield and William Morris are narrative poets whether they write in verse or prose. Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* is itself poetic. The prose of Walter de la Mare and James Stephens shows the same whimsical and profound imagination as their poetry.

But whether the response is along one line or many, the experience that accompanies it is a larger experience than that which the average man gets from the same stimulus. Largeness or breadth of experience does not necessarily imply variety or breadth of physical experience. A man may not have travelled far and yet, imaginatively, have visited distant countries; a Defoe can write with convincing power of a journey through Africa or the experiences of a cavalier in Germany without ever having visited those lands. No one has yet explained how it was that the Brontës, living secluded and solitary lives, were able to picture such characters as find their way into their novels. Or the largeness of experience may consist in greater spiritual intensity or profundity, as in the case of Emily Dickinson. Or it may be the richer interpretation of the ordinary contacts and events of a restricted life, as in the case of Wordsworth or Jane Austen, as well as a new vision of realms never seen by the human eye, as in Blake or Shelley. Whatever it is, the writer has something to offer which the reader does not possess, and so will enrich his life by giving him vicarious experience. That is why we read, whether we be children asking for stories with giants in them, or young girls devouring the latest lurid and impossible romances of desert life, or philosophers absorbed in Nietzsche, or Santayana, or Havelock Ellis.

If the author had no other characteristic than that of breadth of experience, no other power than that of unusual sensitiveness, his life would be one mass or jumble

of experiences and sensations, and a record of his experience would be of interest, perhaps, to the pathologist, but would not be literature. It is obvious that it is necessary for a man to order and balance his experiences to make them suitable material for literature. He must, out of the multitude of contradictory elements, choose those which he can put together into an orderly and balanced whole, which he can so reconcile as to bring about the sense of perfect poise in himself and, if his art of expression is adequate, in the reader, which, according to some authorities, constitutes beauty. That is, he must have a sense of beauty, in which are implicit unity, harmony, and balance. "Great wits," said Dryden, "are sure to madness near allied." Perhaps, in the over-development of certain of their powers and sensibilities, they are, but in this very important respect of balance, they are strangers to it. Not all writers have the power of balance to a high degree, but those who have it most are the greatest writers. This does not mean that an artist must lead a wholly orderly, balanced life. Far from it. Some of the greatest art has come out of tremendous experiences, threatening or even causing the temporary oversetting of the artist's life. But the expression of these experiences, in the form of art, has been wrought into something harmonious and beautiful.

Beauty is a much disputed word. Some writers on æsthetics consider it as an external quality of an object, regardless of its effect upon the beholder or the hearer; others think it is the effect of the object. Whichever way we regard it, the ultimate problem is the same. We use the adjective *beautiful* for various things: for sights, sounds, and all objects that appeal to our physical senses; for ideas and ideals, minds and characters, such as appeal to sensibilities not physical. What is there in common

between a beautiful statue, a beautiful poem, and a beautiful character?

Beauty, says Santayana, "is pleasure objectified."² Yet not everything that pleases us is beautiful. We may find pleasure in the usefulness of a screwdriver; but our attitude toward the screwdriver is not an æsthetic attitude. Some writers on æsthetics have pointed out that to the æsthetic attitude there is need of detachment of the contemplated object from the ordinary processes and purposes of life. If we had a screwdriver made of precious metal, set with stones, wrought into beautiful shapes, we might well look at it, not as a useful tool, but as an object of beauty. But when our pleasure comes from an object or an aspect of an object that is too close to our daily activities, we do not call that object beautiful. Hence we often find in realism interest but not beauty. But, as has been said, "The experienced art lover is able to keep his [æsthetic] attitude under almost any circumstances. It little matters how replete with personal meaning the picture, play, or statue may be, he can respond to its intrinsic beauty, because he is able to perceive and appreciate all the deep subtleties of the formal elements which, through their abstract nature, touch off only general tendencies and modes of action. . . . So long as the formal elements, the modes of presentation, are fully appreciated, the story or content can be as close to one's every interest as is consistent with the purpose of the artist. . . . In short, it is by increasing our knowledge of the formal elements of art that we find our solution for the dilemma."³

What, then, are the formal elements that aid in preserving the æsthetic attitude, that, in the objects con-

² *The Sense of Beauty*, p. 52.

³ Langfeld, *The Æsthetic Attitude*, pp. 78-79.

templated, cause æsthetic pleasure and make us call them beautiful? Sit for an hour in an art gallery, where you can study sculpture and painting in an attempt to find in the statues and pictures the qualities that satisfy and give you pleasure. You will discover that in each statue and each painting there are repose and balance. Even in the "Discobolus," full of action and energy as it is, there is the feeling of repose. The athlete has stood for many centuries ready to hurl the discus, every muscle tense, yet there is no sense of strain. He could stand just so for many centuries more. Why? Because of the perfect balance of the statue, and the consequent effect of controlled power; even the upraised arm shows no fatigue. Since we involuntarily make to sense stimuli an empathic response, that is, since we, by slight physical adjustments, reproduce the motion and the attitude represented or suggested, we personally feel the same pleasurable balance and control.⁴ The same thing is true of the Laocoon group. With all the agony and strain and effort, there is repose, because of the control that comes from the perfect balance of the parts. All artists recognize this; some do not attain it, some deliberately reject it for a certain purpose. Fraser's "End of the Trail," for example, is an impressive but distressing work of art. The downward line from the rider to the horse's nose is not buttressed at all; there is nothing to keep the rider from slipping to the ground. As we look, we feel no repose, but rather a great strain to keep that horseman on

⁴ See Langfeld, *op. cit.*, Chapters V and VI. Empathy, of course, is not confined to the arts that appeal to the eye. Literature and music also produce empathic response. Our muscular adjustments are influenced by descriptions and images and also by harmonies and rhythms. I once saw a boy, sitting with rapt eyes intent upon the singer, following by marked movements of his body the undulations suggested by the imagery and the musical rhythm of "O, for the wings, for the wings of a dove." See the chapter in this book on "Imaginative Expression."

the back of his weary mount. He cannot sit there for ages. In such a case, however, equilibrium in the entire composition is often secured by the background. Similarly, where we find balance and control in the nature of a man or woman, where we have a sense of restfulness as we come in contact with him, there we recognize true beauty of character. And the supremely beautiful poem brings this feeling of repose both to the physical senses and to the mind and soul. Through its descriptions or suggestions it gives a picture that satisfies the eye; its harmonies are balanced to the ear like those of great music; and its conceptions and ideals bring to the mind and soul of the reader, no matter how deeply he is stirred and moved, a sense of harmony and peace.

Beauty exists, then, both in the experience and in the effect upon the experiencer. Many minor balances and harmonies contribute to this effect: lovely curves and colors in painting and sculpture, gracious looks and deeds in the human, combinations of sound and flashing phrase in poetry. That is, by the truly beautiful, all our faculties are put into a state of harmony and balance. We can often feel beauty even under the roughest outlines. A statue just beginning to take shape under the sculptor's chisel, with jagged points and abrupt angles still showing, may have beauty. We often find it under a gruff and unprepossessing human exterior. Even some of the cubist paintings have a certain beauty, because the parts are balanced. And we find it in the totality of Browning's *A Grammarian's Funeral*, in spite of its harsh sounds and grotesque rhymes.

Often the implications and suggestions and meanings of natural scene or painting or poem lend it beauty or intensify what it intrinsically possesses. And yet a meaning that is beautiful will not make a line of poetry com-

pletely beautiful unless its harmonies and the images it creates are also beautiful. Tennyson said that the line from Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*,

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,

was the most beautiful line in all English poetry because it suggested the union of permanence and impermanence. That is, he found the meaning supremely beautiful, suggestive of balance and harmony and unity in the physical and spiritual universe. But he must have realized also that the sound of the line, with its assonances and alliteration, is balanced and harmonious, that the simplicity and dignity of the words are harmonious with the idea, and that the image of the sunset has in itself all the elements of supreme beauty. For all these reasons, then, this line created for Tennyson, as it does for almost all of us, a moment of intense æsthetic pleasure, a moment when, absorbed in the meaning, the sound, and the suggestions of the line, we have a sense of unity, of completeness, of balance—in short, “the perfect moment.” E. D. Puffer says, “The experience of the beautiful constitutes a reconciliation of the warring elements of experience . . . and the beautiful object is such that it constitutes the permanent possibility for this reconciliation.”⁵ “Thus the Nature of Beauty is in the relation of means to an end; the means, the possibilities of stimulation in the motor, visual, auditory, and purely ideal fields; the end, a moment of perfection, of self-complete unity of experience, of favorable stimulation with repose.”⁶ Symmetry is not necessary to beauty; in fact, it is often undesirable, as suggesting too mechanical a balance. Nor is completeness requisite. There may be balance and harmony in a fragment: the Winged Victory and *Kubla*

⁵ *The Psychology of Beauty*, pp. 44-45.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

Khan are both supremely beautiful. "Beauty is not perfection; but the beauty of an object lies in its permanent possibility of creating the perfect moment."⁷

The power that enables the author to bring out of the chaos of his experiences this balance and order, we may call imagination. For imagination is something more, at least in the mind of the literary critic, than the mere ability to form images of "absent things as if they were present." The literary critic may run foul of the psychologist here. In fact, the behaviorist will admit no such word to his dictionary, it seems, and the introspectionist will strictly limit its meaning. But in the confusion of definitions, perhaps the literary critic may be allowed to make his own; he will certainly be loth to give up the word entirely, for it stands for a very definite possession of the artist which nothing else can quite describe. "My shaping spirit of Imagination," Coleridge called it in *Dejection*, and, in the *Biographia Literaria*, "the Soul that is everywhere, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole."⁸ And again, in the same chapter, he says, "This power . . . reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities." Thus it seems closely related to the sense of beauty, as it has been described, and appears to be the function which enables the artist to create beauty out of his experience.

His imagination shows itself in different ways. By using it, the writer gathers together the scattered elements of

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 56. It is evident that this discussion of beauty is eclectic. Hedonism, empathy, synæsthesia,—they all contribute to the complete understanding of beauty. I have endeavored to make the discussion as simple in idea and expression as possible, avoiding the frequently cryptic and confusing terminology of *Æsthetics*. The subject, which is a very large one, may be followed out in the books listed as references for this chapter.

⁸ *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter XIV.

his experience, and selects the material which he wishes to use. What he selects he may present nearly as he finds it. Or he may recombine it into new wholes; that is, he may create a plot, a scene, a character, lifelike and yet in its entirety unlike any plot, scene, or character he has ever known. Also by his imagination he may find in his experiences new meanings and may interpret them for his reader. All these elements of his experience he arranges and balances, and he constructs out of them an artistic whole that shall, by its very structure, have a certain power over the imagination of the reader. Finally, by his imagination he may discover just the words and combinations of words that will serve to express the beauty of his experiences. That is, it is the possession of imagination that transforms a human being from a sensitive man of large experience into a writer of talent or genius.

All this discussion of the characteristics and powers of the author, based as it is on the fundamental proposition that literature is a record of experience, is leading gradually to a formulation of the tests of literary excellence and the definition of literature. There are several indications that often seem to mark literary excellence and that are frequently responsible for the careless use of the word *masterpiece* that we have already mentioned. They are not sure and final tests, however, but mere external signs. They may point to real greatness, but they may also point to some quality that looks like greatness but that will soon show the cotton threads in the warp or that will prove to be all shoddy.

The first and most obvious of these unreliable indications is widespread popularity. Great literature, of course, may be—ideally it should be, perhaps—widely popular. But the converse of that optimistic statement is not true;

not all that has a wide appeal is literature. Popularity may be due to so many other causes besides real worth,—to timeliness, to novelty, to good advertising, to the carrying power of a name,—that there is no assurance that it is a proof of the existence of high merit. Many a best seller in the ranks of fiction has a meteoric rise and fall. It has the qualities that give it instant and wide popularity: a romantic plot; a hero that is either the sum of all the virtues or “a regular he-man,” depending upon whether he is created according to the conventions of the eighteenth century or those of the twentieth; a heroine to correspond; a villain for whom the conventions are much the same in all centuries; a fairly fluent style; plenty of sentimentality; a happy ending. It will sell into the hundreds of thousands for a year or maybe two, but it will soon be among “the snows of yester-year.” Why? Because the next novel written on the same pattern by the same author or another will supplant it and will satisfy the public just as well. Until the intellectual millennium, perhaps, there will continue a demand for such books, and the “frantic novels,” as Wordsworth called them, will be turned out to meet that demand. But look back to a list of best-sellers of a few years ago and see how few of the titles now mean anything to you or to the reading public in general. They have been supplanted by others. The conditions that cause such a demand are with us to stay, apparently. For many people such books furnish “a literature of escape.” Wordsworth, writing his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* in the year 1800, might have been speaking of our own day.

For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these

causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident. . . . To this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves. The invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse.

We make a few changes of phrase here, such as the addition of "moving pictures" to "theatrical exhibitions," and we have a fairly just description of conditions in our own day. Whom do we see nightly at the "movies" or devouring the latest romance on the way back and forth from work, but the typist who hopes, the next time she looks up from her machine, to see the dark, mysterious eyes of her hero fixed upon her, or the young man at a desk in the office, who dreams that the next telephone call will bring him either sudden promotion or a chance for adventure? It is vicarious experience that these people are demanding, and that demand will always be satisfied, but satisfied by ever new volumes.

The romantic, impossible novel is a good illustration of the fallaciousness of popularity as an index of literary merit. A study of contemporary writing will yield many others. The excitement and suspense and horror of the mystery story, the sentimental commonplaces of some contemporary verse, the novelty of form and subject-matter in other, will win many readers. The strong appeal of sex is evidenced by the enormous sale of the magazines which emphasize it but keep just on the safe side of the law. "Have you read *So-and-So?*" said the custodian of a "fiction library." "Everybody's reading it; we have five copies and they're never in. They say it's decidedly off color." *Getting Gertie's Garter* will run six

weeks on the stage of a small city and *Old English* will stay for one. It is obviously impossible, therefore, to claim that popularity is a test of literary value.

It may be said that the appeal of books of the kind mentioned above is wide but low, to that large group of uncultured and untrained people who are not acquainted with better literature. Perhaps that is true, although college students and graduates have helped to swell the numbers of the readers of a trashy magazine or a "frantic novel." And is an appeal to the comparatively small numbers of highly cultivated readers any surer test of literary value? The books that find favor with the intelligentsia are certainly more likely to have the qualities that place them with true literature, but even that kind of popularity may be specious and temporary. A strange new idea, a clever style, an exotic treatment may make a book of prose or verse the talk of cultured circles for a while. But the winds of such popularity too may be merely gusty, and may die down as quickly as those raised by the crowd. The next intellectual or erotic sensation will cause the last one to be forgotten as quickly as the next sentimentality will take the place of the last of its kind. There may be books that are caviare to the general and are at the same time literature, such as Meredith's poetry and prose, for instance, but the mere fact that a book appeals strongly to the cultured is no proof of its merit.

It has been suggested that one reason why the test of popularity with the many or the few is unreliable is that books that are thus popular are apt to be merely temporary occupants of public attention. Does this mean that length of life is any surer indication of literary worth? A halo of sanctity has been placed by some school-teachers around books that have survived the passage of time,

and children have been taught that they must like them whether or no. The young rebel who asks the point of studying *Beowulf* causes a stir of dismay in a well brought up class. But that is a legitimate and healthy question. If there were no point except the fact that it has been preserved for these twelve hundred years or so, there would be no justification for studying it or for praising it as great literature. To be sure, the odds are on the side of a book that has survived; if it has lived for twelve hundred years or more, the chances are that there are in it the incorruptible fruits of genius. But the mere fact that it has lived so long proves nothing at all. The sole manuscript of *Beowulf* was almost destroyed by fire; if it had been consumed, surely no one would say that it had consequently no merit. It is just as impossible to say that because it was not burned up it has merit. Many a manuscript has been kept, many a book reprinted, not because of any literary merit but because of a curious interest in something quaint and old or because of the usefulness of the book or the importance or fascination of it as a record of the times in which it was written. It has been preserved as an old map or an old treatise on the city of London in Shakespeare's time might have been preserved. If, however, a book has survived the years, it behoves us to examine it carefully and find out what there is in it that has made it survive. For long life, although not an infallible test of strength, is usually an indication of greatness.

Indeed, permanence and survival, though not synonymous, do overlap to a large extent. The question that confronts us when we are considering an older book is this: What is there in this book that gave it so wide an appeal in its own day that sufficient copies were preserved to ensure its outlasting the generation of its author, and

what that so recommended it to succeeding generations as to cause its continued existence? In brief, what are the characteristics of great literature that give it a wide and a permanent appeal? What, in contemporary books, must we look for if we are to make an attempt to determine whether they are great and will be permanent? These are the questions that criticism must answer.

It has been said earlier in this chapter that literature is, fundamentally, a record of experience, and that that experience must be larger than that of the average reader in order that the record of it may enrich his life. It seems true, however, that the experience of the author should have more definite values than mere largeness in order to produce great literature. The simple service of adding to one's information or knowledge may be performed by a guide-book, a text in psychology, or a treatise on sociology as well as by a novel of industrial life in a foreign country. In each case, the author's experience, which is larger in that particular field than that of the average reader, is recorded for the purpose of making fuller the experience of the reader. It is obviously not merely because the novel combines description of new background, psychology, and sociology that we call it literature.

If we inquire carefully in what ways we expect to be enriched by our contact with great books, we shall find that they are three in number. We look for intellectual, spiritual, and emotional refreshment and growth. If this is true, then the experience of the author must have intellectual, ethical, and emotional value. This is not saying that all three of these values are equal, or even that every work of art must possess all three. We are considering literature in general and in its highest form, and in that highest form it will be found to be valuable in these three

ways. The greatest books will possess intellectual, ethical, and emotional value.

Now the first of these values, the intellectual, is not necessarily a distinguishing mark of literature. As has already been said, the guide-book or the scientific text has intellectual value and enriches our lives to the extent that it imparts information to us, but it is not literature. Also, there may be books of religious or philosophical import whose positive ethical value may be great, but which we should not call literature. Every book, however, that has real emotional value will be found within the ranks of what the world calls literature, and every book that does not, in itself, legitimately appeal to the emotions is outside the pale. The mere text book, although its implications may excite the student, does not in itself stir the emotions. Although some of those books inveighed against earlier in this chapter may have the power to move a superficial sort of emotion, that emotion is grounded on sentimentality rather than real sentiment; and since the value of such an emotion is decidedly questionable, the rating of a book of this kind, if it were admitted to the domain of literature at all, would be very low. In general it seems that the book that has real emotional value for us is the book that promises greatness and permanence. Perhaps the reason for this is that although intellectual standards and ethical conventions change as the years pass and vary in different parts of the world, human emotions have remained much the same since the beginning of civilization, and they vary little with a change of geography. The nature of these three values, their requirements, and their relations to each other will be discussed in later chapters.

Closely connected with the problems that have just been suggested is that of the universality of the experi-

ence of the author. In order to have true literary merit, must it not merely have intellectual, ethical, and emotional value, but also have those values for everyone? The obvious answer to such a question is that there are degrees of greatness in literature and that those degrees depend partly on the approach to universality in the experience itself. A book that deals with the problem of a particular locality or a particular generation may have great local or temporary value, but its value may be much smaller in a different community or may wane when the problem ceases to be pressing. No one can deny, for instance, that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was a great book for its own time; its ethical, emotional, even its intellectual values were high. But now that slavery has been abolished, those values have greatly decreased, for they resulted from the temporary importance of the question discussed and not from anything more enduring. The novels of Dickens, on the other hand, are still great because they present, not merely the evil conditions of boys' schools, debtors' prisons, and poorhouses, but the state of human nature. Yet even the novels of Dickens have their obvious limitations, and they are not to be ranked with the greatest literature. Similarly there may be limitations in the appeal of books for other causes. The fanciful conception that underlies Elinor Wylie's *The Venetian Glass Nephew*, or even her *Jennifer Lorn*, is quite outside the possibility of experience for some readers, and they say, "Very pretty, but what's the use of it?" The experience of the author here has value for a restricted group of people. What must be understood, however, is that this restriction does not necessarily place a book outside the pale of literature; it merely points to the fact that it is less great as literature than other books that have a wider and more permanent appeal. Other

things being equal, the experience that has value for an appreciable number will produce a good book; if the value of that experience is high, even though it is still limited, the book may be great; but the possession of great and universal value will, if the expression is equally fine, produce the book or the poem of enduring significance and appeal, the true masterpiece. Dr. Johnson, stern and intolerant old "watchdog of classicism" as he was, knew that the Odes of Gray had a limited appeal, but of the *Elegy* he said, "*The Church-yard* abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo. The four stanzas beginning, 'Yet even these bones', are to me original: I have never seen the notions in any other place; yet he that reads them here, persuades himself that he has always felt them." ⁹ Thus are masterpieces made, out of experiences that "find a mirror in every mind," and "to which every bosom returns an echo." The emotions that inspire the greatest lyric poetry, the ideas that inform the greatest essays, the characters that move through the greatest narrative and drama, are the emotions, the ideas, the characters that are familiar to us all, that have been so through the ages, and that will be in time to come. Achilles and Hamlet and Tess are the stuff out of which supreme literature is formed. For they, like the great poet himself, are "not of an age but for all time." Dryden saw that too when he wrote of Chaucer, using the same adjective that he had already used of Shakespeare,

He must have been a man of a most wonderful comprehensive nature, because, as it has been truly observed of him, he has taken into the compass of his *Canterbury Tales* the various manners and humours (as we now call them) of the whole English nation in

⁹ *Life of Gray*.

his age. Not a single character has escaped him. All his pilgrims are severally distinguished from each other; and not only in their inclinations, but in their very physiognomies and persons. . . . We have our forefathers and great-grand-dames all before us, as they were in Chaucer's days: their general characters are still remaining in mankind, and even in England, though they are called by other names than those of monks and friars and canons and lady abbesses and nuns; for mankind is ever the same, and nothing lost out of Nature, though everything is altered.¹⁰

So far our concern has been with the content of literature, the material out of which it is made. The author must have, to work with, experience that is valuable. But to produce literature and to perform the whole function of the maker of literature, the author must not only have that experience but transmit it to his readers in such a form that it will have a corresponding value for them. That is, he must so express his ideas, ideals, and emotions that they will be reproduced, with more or less fidelity, in the reader. This means that literature is something greater than a mere record of experience. If it were not, the daily newspaper would be literature, for it contains material that has potential value. But we know that very seldom does art so enter into a journalistic account that we could not substitute from another newspaper a column on the same story and never know the difference. There have been many text books written on Algebra, and, if they are equally clear and comprehensive and accurate, one may supplant the

¹⁰ Preface to the *Fables*. An excellent summary of this matter of the relationship of greatness in literature to the approach of the individual book to universality, treated from a slightly different angle, is given by George E. Woodberry in *The Appreciation of Literature*, pp. 4-5. He divides literature into three types, personal, national, and universal, and concludes, "The direct appeal to experience . . . without the intervention of study, is made on the ground of universal life; and to this kind, by virtue of the universal element in it, the most enduring literature belongs."

other. There have been many great books written on the same theme, but one does not supplant the other. No one will discard Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* just because Goethe wrote his *Faust*; Wordsworth's *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* may not be substituted for Herrick's *To Daffodils*. The peculiar value which his experience has for the author finds expression in the form which he gives to it,—the interpretation he places upon it, the way in which he organizes and arranges the details of it, and finally the words in which he clothes it. These matters are highly important in the successful transmission of the author's experience to the reader. To be sure, no reader will repeat exactly the experience of the writer, for human nature differs too greatly in individuals for one man to understand and feel precisely as another man does, and language is too feeble to express all the shades of experience. But there is some grave fault in the expression if the reader does not get some approximation to the original experience. The form of Browning's poetry sometimes obscures his meaning, and the intellectual, ethical, and emotional value of his experience is dulled if not entirely lost. The familiar story of the man who said that there were only two lines in *Sordello* that were clear, the first and the last, and those two were lies, illustrates the importance of expression in transmitting experience. Among contemporary writers, Miss Gertrude Stein has to express experiences that she undoubtedly regards as valuable, but for most of her readers the style of a passage like the following utterly fails to convey the idea or the feeling which she probably wished it to convey:

Not as yet and to ask a question and to ask a question and as not yet. As not yet and to as yet and to ask a question and to as yet and to wind as yet and to as yet and to ask a question and to as

yet ask a question as not yet, as not yet and to ask as not yet, and as not yet to ask a question as yet, and to as yet to wind as not yet, as not yet to wind please wind as not yet to ask a question and to and not yet. Please wind the clock and as yet and as not yet. Please wind the clock and not yet, to please not yet as not yet.¹¹

Style or expression, then, is important for its usefulness in transmitting valuable experience, and the author of genius must have command over form in order to produce literature. Else he may be a "mute, inglorious Milton." But style has likewise a value of its own. Miss Stein's *Geography and Plays* was described as "a book of verse in which words are chosen and put together not for their sense, but for their harmony and syllabification." This is the extreme expression of the theory, but there have been many critics and artists who have put the stress on style or language rather than on content. Longinus said, "The Sublime, wherever it occurs, consists in a certain loftiness and excellence of language, and . . . it is by this, and this only, that the greatest poets and prose-writers have gained eminence, and won themselves a lasting place in the Temple of Fame."¹² "Literature," said Newman, "is the personal use and exercise of language." Pope recognizes the presence of such critics in the eighteenth century by the lines in his *Essay on Criticism*,

Others for language all their care express,
And value books, as women men, for dress:
Their praise is still—the Style is excellent;
The Sense they humbly take upon content.

Certainly the images and the harmonies of poetry are

¹¹ "The Fifteenth of November," from *The New Criterion*, reprinted in *Georgian Stories*, 1926 (Copyright, 1927, by G. P. Putnam's Sons. Used by permission of the publishers.) This passage is on page 257.

¹² *On the Sublime*, Section I.

in themselves important; the beauty and the value of form should be placed side by side with the beauty and the value of content. The masterpiece presents an experience of enduring, universal value in words that themselves are not only fitting but of enduring and universal beauty. It is a very difficult task to separate form and content for our consideration: words are not merely the raiment of thought; they are like those strange integuments of Paltock's flying Indians, and can scarcely be removed without danger to the body they cover. The meaning of words is so closely bound up with their sound, that it is almost impossible to consider the independent value of the words themselves. This fact spoils for us the worth of an experiment like Miss Stein's; the mind insists upon trying to make sense out of the words that are themselves the signs of specific ideas. Only in the case of an unknown foreign tongue can we see the possibilities of this problem. A translation of Homer's *Odyssey*, no matter how literal it may be, will lack much of the value of the original. A translation that is itself good literary English will have more value than the literal translation, but the added value will be that of the English words, not of the original. On the other hand, if we are unfamiliar with Greek and listen to the reading of the *Odyssey* by someone who knows it, we shall feel and enjoy the beauty of the sound of the words detached from any meaning. The pleasure thus derived will be akin to that derived from music. More people, however, will gain pleasure from the translation than from hearing the original Greek, if they do not understand the language. This is probably because we are trained in general to read for content and not for sound; we see the words, we do not hear them, and their subtle beauties and harmonies are too often hid-

den from us. In a later chapter we shall study the ways in which words, singly and in combination, may be made to have value for us apart from their meaning. Of course it is true that often words that are totally unfamiliar have meaning because their sound suggests an idea or an image. If the reader chooses from the *Odyssey* the description of Nausicaa and her maidens playing ball, we shall realize this. Just so music is frequently highly suggestive of meaning. But apart from any significance, direct or suggested, the words may have a real and a great beauty. In the *Memoir* of Tennyson by his son is told the story of an old Japanese poet who, meeting an Englishman, brought out a book containing parts of *In Memoriam* which he had copied out and asked him to read them. When the reader had finished, the poet said "that, tho' he did not know the words, the music spoke to him, and he knew he felt as the poet felt when he wrote the poems, for the music talked in a tongue that could not be mistaken, and he knew the poems were very beautiful." ¹³

We may now return with more confidence to the questions raised at the beginning of this chapter, and attempt a definition or at least a description of the disputed terms. Literature, as we have viewed it here, is the expression of an experience which has intellectual, ethical, and especially emotional value, in such form that the value of that experience will be adequately transmitted to the reader and that the form itself will have an independent value and beauty. The masterpiece is that work of art in which these values and beauties are at their highest and are enduring and universal. The author, that is, the creator of literature, is a man of greater sensitiveness and broader experience than the

¹³ *Alfred, Lord Tennyson, a Memoir* (Macmillan, 1899), Vol. II, p. 405.

average man, with a sense of beauty and a power of imagination that enable him to order and balance his experiences, and with a command of language that empowers him to transmit the value of his experience and to make a thing of beauty out of the expression of it. The genius is the writer who possesses this equipment in the highest degree.

With these definitions as a starting point, the course of the critic is clear. He must investigate the problems of the value of the content of literature and also of the imaginative form into which it is put. He will be a road-maker; that is, he will lay down the principles that control the estimation of these values. Then, with novel, essay, play, or poem in hand, he will travel these roads that he has built, and arrive at the goal of an intelligent appreciation and judgment of his book.

It must be recognized, of course, that in no human achievement will all these values and beauties be found in perfection. They are the Platonic prototypes, of which the shadows only are present to our finite senses. Still more must we realize that the ideal scientific-creative critic does not exist, and that most men, with their various capabilities and limitations, are very far indeed from fulfilling the requirements. It is conceivable, however, that a book, measured by the ideal critic against the prototype, may be found to possess certain absolute values. But the actual flesh-and-blood critics, owing to differences in training, environment, and experience, in intellectual ability, emotional capacity, and the delicacy of their physical senses, may not be able to perceive all those values. Not merely are some of the colors of the spectrum invisible to the human eye, but also some men may be color-blind and not see the red or the green. The ultimate judgments of the worth of a book, there-

fore, will vary with the personal equation, and no one critic will be an infallible guide for every reader. A book may mean much to one man and little to his neighbor, yet both of them, if their judgments are "the final after-growth of much endeavor," may, within their limitations, be right.

CHAPTER III

INTELLECTUAL VALUE

WE, as human beings, are rational creatures, and every stimulus, except one that produces merely reflex action, starts some kind of mental current. We cannot read the words of an advertisement in the street car without making a mental response. This response, however, need not be the result of any real intellectual value in what we read. What we mean by intellectual value is something in the book or poem which makes us think to some purpose, so that our mental life is enriched and enlarged as a result. The advertisement may make us think to the purpose of using a certain soap in which to wash delicate fabrics and thus may contribute to our financial and physical well-being, but it will not enrich our intellectual life. The book that has intellectual value may not help us financially or physically, but to our minds it will give increase.

The other arts do not place great emphasis on intellectual value. Music, painting, sculpture, the dance,—all these appeal primarily and chiefly through the senses, and they convey beauty through ear and eye. The sound or the sight in itself satisfies and enriches. Yet all art has some intellectual appeal. The connection between visual images and ideas seems always much closer than that between inarticulate sound images and ideas. Hence music, which can produce visual images only by suggestion,—a suggestion which it is quite possible for the listener to ignore—has been called the least intellectual,

the most purely emotional of the arts. Painting and sculpture have a more direct and sure appeal to the mind. Yet we find that in most great music, as well as in great painting and sculpture, there is some meaning, some conception expressed which the artist intended to convey to his hearers or observers. Said Tchaikovsky, "I do not wish any symphonic work to emanate from me which has nothing to express, and consists merely of harmonies and a purposeless design of rhythms and modulations."¹ Dancing, too, when it is an art, is usually interpretative. How much more must literature, whose vehicle is articulate speech, appealing through the physical or the mind's ear to the mind itself, and setting up a train of ideas, consider important the intellectual content.

This does not mean, however, that all literature must present a profound truth, solve a pressing intellectual problem, make its readers think long and deeply. In intellectual value, as in other matters, there are degrees. The greatest literature does all this, but we should be very reluctant to condemn the romance of a Stevenson, the sparkling comedy of a Sheridan, the delightful society verses of a Praed or a Gilbert, the glamorous poetry of a Swinburne, from all of which we have had so much and so many kinds of pleasure, simply because the intellectual value was small. Even these works have their intellectual value. They enrich the mind by the purifying effects of high humor or the enlargement that comes from the mere contact with another mind with different ideas and ideals. And they have other values that supplement the small intellectual worth. No book

¹ Tchaikovsky, Modeste, *The Life and Letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky*, edited from the Russian by Rosa Newmarch (John Lane, 1906), p. 294.

will stand or fall if judged by its intellectual value alone; that must be considered in relation to the other values of content and expression that it shows.

There have been periods, such as the neo-classic age of Pope, when the emphasis in writing has been on the intellectual rather than the emotional. The satires, verse essays, epigrams, pastorals, and objective odes of the early eighteenth century revealed and stirred the emotions very little. Here lies, perhaps, the reason why Pope is not to be ranked among the greatest writers. The French have always stressed the intellectual element in literature more than have the English; their neo-classicism, for instance, was more thorough than that across the Channel. In some kinds of writing the intellectual element is important, in history, in biography, in the essay. But it is true that the more the emphasis shifts to the emotions in these forms of writing, the greater literature they become. In what are sometimes called the creative forms of literature, fiction, drama, and poetry, the intellectual is usually subordinated to the emotional. But there are some authors, even of creative work, whose writing is predominantly intellectual. Pope has already been mentioned; Browning and Edwin Arlington Robinson and Shaw and Samuel Butler too have very largely an intellectual appeal. Yet because Browning and Robinson are dealing chiefly with men and women, their concern is with the emotions as well as the thoughts of people, and their poetry has larger values than that of Pope.

Such predominance of the intellectual does not produce the greatest literature.² But all great literature—that of

² There are those, like Mr. George Moore, who believe that poetry—pure poetry—should be quite objective, entirely free from ideas personal to the author. Some schools of modern thought regard poetry merely as a record of images or sense impressions, not as the expression of

universal and enduring appeal—will, upon examination, be found to contain a high degree of intellectual value. The intellectual value, however, never overshadows the others. Men's minds are so different that a book that depends chiefly on the intellectual for its appeal will fail of universality and will fall below the rank of a masterpiece. Yet no play of Shakespeare, no poem of Chaucer or Milton or Shelley, no novel of Thackeray or Hardy is without the qualities that appeal directly to the mind and enlarge it.

In order to discover what those qualities are, let us examine a poem which is universally considered one of the great poems in the English language, Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale*. In reading this poem for our immediate purpose, it is necessary to disregard, as far as possible, the powerful emotional appeal and the exquisite form, and consider merely its intellectual content. Keats is here expressing his gospel of beauty in one of its forms. The song of the nightingale, he says, is a symbol of beauty in nature, that beauty which can afford to man a refuge from the cares and sorrows of the world and which is eternal.

In the first place, this thought is perfectly clear. There is never a moment's hesitation in the poet's mind; although, with the vanishing of the bird's song, he questions the reality of his experience, he never doubts the truth of his idea. It is the same conception of beauty that he has expressed in many other places, notably in *Endymion* and in the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. This clarity of thought is characteristic of all supreme literature. Although Hamlet himself may be an enigma, partly because his own thinking was not clear, there is no lack

thought. Such too is Chinese poetry, which has been much commended and imitated in recent years.

of clarity in Shakespeare's conception of the nature and the destiny of such a character. In a great novel like *Vanity Fair*, nothing is blurred. But when the writer is groping after something, when he is not sure in his own mind what he is trying to say, then we get a drama like Byron's *Cain*, which, with many indications of genius, fails of real greatness. We are not considering here clarity of expression; that is a different problem altogether. Browning, whom many find difficult to understand, is obscure because of the style of his poems, not because his thought is not clear. Once we get beyond the verbal difficulty, we shall find no more trouble. A wealth of recondite allusion, as in Milton, a bewildering piling up of images, as in Shelley, an extreme condensation of phrase, as in Meredith, may make a poem seem obscure. But if there is no blurring of the thought back of the expression, then it has that quality of intellectual clarity which is one of the important factors in its total value. What, for instance, does Meredith mean by these lines in *Earth and Man*?

His breath of instant thirst
Is warning of a creature matched with strife,
To meet it as a bride, or let fall life
On life's accursed.

But read the following paraphrase by Lafcadio Hearn and then turn back to the poetry, and it will be evident that there is no real obscurity in the intellectual process:

Even the first cry of the child, the cry of thirst for the mother's milk, signifies that man is born to desire and to toil and to contend. He must either meet the duty of struggle as gladly as he would meet a bride, or he must acknowledge himself unfit to live, and cursed by his own mother, Nature.*

* "The Poetry of George Meredith," in *Life and Literature* (Dodd, Mead and Co., 1917), p. 165.

One hesitates to apply the word logical to poetry. Yet all great art is strictly logical. This fact is more obvious in the case of fiction and drama. There must be no intellectual gaps or inconsistencies in the conception of plot or character, if novel or play is to be ranked with the highest. If the reader comes to the end of one intellectual path and is forced either to leap a chasm or strike out through the woods to find the beginning of the next road in order to be able to proceed, he feels a lack in the intellectual value of the book. And in poetry there should be no *non sequitur*. The thought of the *Ode to a Nightingale* proceeds logically and inevitably from the mood that induced the poem, and there are no inconsistencies between its parts. There have been good books, even great books, that are illogical at times, but they are not the supreme works of art. *Tristram Shandy* is not among the greatest masterpieces. Yet an intentional illogicality may contribute great charm to a book. Whimsicality such as is found in *Tristram Shandy* has its own intellectual value, akin to that of humor.

The thought of the *Ode to a Nightingale* is Keats' own; it is in the highest sense original. This does not mean that no man before Keats ever felt that the beauty of nature had the power to soothe or realized that beauty was ever-living. The poetry of Wordsworth alone would make such a statement impossible. Originality, as has been suggested in a former chapter, does not necessarily consist in being different from everyone else; it does mean thinking independently of others and making every opinion so much one's own that it does not matter whether one is the first to hold it or not. This Keats has done with his conception of beauty,—he has done it so surely that it is he whom we quote when we wish to say that a thing of beauty is a joy forever. Such orig-

inality of thought is to be found in the *Ode to a Nightingale* and in all great literature. "There is no new thing under the sun," said the Preacher. And he is right. The fundamental, the important things are as old as man himself. There are endless permutations and combinations of these prime factors in the problem of life; there are endless new ways in which an old idea may be presented. Herein lies the originality of the artist; if the conception comes with new force and meaning from his pen it is to all intents and purposes original. Many writers have grappled with the intellectual problem of the reason for the existence of evil in the world: whether it is Milton striving to justify the ways of God to men, or Browning, who makes his musician say,

Why rushed the discords in, but that harmony should be prized?
or Swinburne, thanking

Whatever gods may be
That no life lives forever,—

for each the concept takes a new and original form. This originality of effect is due very largely to the imaginative treatment given to the thought by the individual author, and as such will be considered later. It is sufficient to point out here that all great literature is original in thought in the sense that the thought is distinctly the property of the writer. Second hand thinking has as little value in literature as in science or philosophy. The man who gets his opinions ready made and does not fashion them for himself on the forge of his own mind, will produce nothing but frigid verse or superficial essays. This particular kind of unoriginality is responsible for the wretched literary quality of many hymns. The ideas as well as the diction are the common stock in trade of

religious versifiers, and one hymn means no more than another. This is obviously not the case with the great hymns; they are the product of an assured and burning conviction of the truth of the idea which they express, and hence are thoroughly original. The great writer thinks creatively, to adopt the phrase of James Harvey Robinson in his *Mind in the Making*, and masterpieces owe part of their value to the original, creative thought that they express.

In the fourth place, literature, although we do not go to it primarily for information, may supplement our knowledge on many points and hence in the mere matter of information have real value for us. But the question may be raised whether this is true literary value, or whether the same service might not be as well or better performed by some book that does not pretend to literary merit. As has been said before, information by and of itself has no literary value. But in combination with other values it may serve so to enrich and enlarge the experience of the reader that it will take on a value of its own. Lyric poetry as a type conveys less information than any other form of writing. Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale* is virtually free of it. It does, to be sure, tell something of the character and the experiences of the poet, and so has distinct value for the biographer. Yet this is not literary value; the same information might be furnished by a letter. It may, however, when turned back upon the poem, add to our appreciation of the literary value of the *Ode* by increasing our understanding of it. In other forms of writing than the lyric we may find a definite informational purpose. The narrative poem, the novel, or the play may have for one of its ends and aims the presentation of information about history or society, past or present. A subordinate purpose in most

books, especially in the greatest works of art, it may well be the *raison d'être* of the historical novel. But the historical novel which is the result only of the desire to instruct and not of the realization that here in the past are the realities of life that may be put in some new form, is apt to be negligible as literature. The same thing is true of the didactic poem, which tells how to make cider or shear sheep. But, although the primary purpose and the primary value rest elsewhere,—in the portrayal of human life in *Kenilworth* or the revelation of the spirit of Italy in the *Georgics*,—the information about Elizabethan England or about bee-culture is of real value. It means for the reader an enrichment of his intellectual life, an increase of the interest and the joy of living. It brings him into contact with a mind that is richer and fuller than his own, that has had more experiences out of which to create beauty. That acquaintance should be a stimulating one. The same thing is true of books in which the information is merely incidental. How rich a mind Milton reveals to us in his poetry, stored with all the wealth of Biblical, classical, and scientific lore. Such a revelation may be discouraging to those who have to struggle with notes and a classical dictionary. But so Keats gained his classical information and the world has been the richer for his enrichment. Strangely enough, this classical lore does not show itself in the *Ode to a Nightingale*, in spite of the legend of Philomela. Here it is the bird that Keats is listening to, part of the great world of nature, not the woman with "racked heart and brain." His poem is more personal, more subjective than Arnold's. Its value rests on other things than information.

The legitimacy and literary worth of classical, Biblical, and even historical information in the form of allusions

in poetry has seldom been questioned. They carry with them such a wealth of artistic and human association that their intellectual value is welded with their emotional value. Unless their use is merely an artificial and conventional repetition of classical names for natural things, as was true in the minor poetry of the eighteenth century, they have a real illuminative and suggestive power. The claim of scientific allusion to be admitted into poetry has been considered debatable. Science seems to belong so wholly to the intellect that it appears to have no place in so emotional a form as poetry. Yet it is true that there is a very strong resemblance between the imagination of the poet and that of the scientist. The discoverer or inventor, unless he is working strictly on the Baconian method, has a guiding vision that necessitates a power of seeing "absent things as if they were present" and of bringing together the elements of experience and vision in balance and harmony. A view of the heavens through a powerful telescope, the examination of a minute cell through a microscope, the study of atoms and electrons are all capable of stirring the imagination as strongly as the knowledge of Greek or Hebrew antiquity. Many of our great poets have been keenly interested in science. On the roll of the Royal Society there have been many men of letters. Keats studied medicine. Shelley, at the University, was absorbed, not, as might have been expected, in a study of the classics, but in scientific experiment. And, what is more to the point, these poets used their scientific knowledge in their poetry. It is not very often that we find it, but there are plenty of instances. Wordsworth, answering the question whether science is ever a fit subject for poetry, says, in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*,

The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, if the time should ever come when these things shall be familiar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of these respective sciences shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings.

With this in mind, read Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, in which he uses science throughout, with at least three definite allusions to scientific fact. At the end of the poem he says,

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!

Here he is using a fact that is familiar to all of us, the fertilizing power of the dead leaves, and so fulfills the first of Wordsworth's requirements. Similarly he employs the fact that clouds are formed by the drawing of water from the lakes and oceans by the sun in the lines,

Thou on whose stream, mid the steep sky's commotion,
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,
Angels of rain and lightning—

Far less familiar is the fact that underlies the lines,

while far below
The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear
The sapless foliage of the ocean know
Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear,
And tremble and despoil themselves.

It is obvious, however, that if Shelley had stated baldly the facts alluded to in the first two passages, or had expressed that of the last lines quoted as he did in his prose note of explanation,—“The vegetation at the bottom of the sea, of rivers, and of lakes, sympathizes with

that of the land in the change of seasons, and is consequently influenced by the winds which announce it"—there would have been no poetry in these portions of the Ode. He has, in the words of Wordsworth, made them "manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings." That is, he has given these facts, dry and merely intellectual in themselves, an emotional significance. It is not the mere mathematics of astronomy or physics that makes us gasp when we look through a great telescope or see a demonstration of atomic structure; it is the relation we make of these facts to human life, to our own lives, that stirs our imagination and our emotions. When we do that, astronomy and physics are possible subjects for poetry, even though they have not become familiar to us. So Alfred Noyes, in his *Watchers of the Sky*, gives no mere record of scientific history, but a vision of infinite space and of the noble ambitions and achievements of great minds. This is what literature does with all information: it transmutes it into something more than information; it not only puts together the dry bones but it breathes life into them, and both mind and soul are enriched and satisfied. The intellectual value is enhanced by the emotional value.

It sometimes happens that the information presented in a work of art is not accurate. In a kind of writing devoted mainly to the purpose of instruction, such as history, inaccuracy would be unpardonable. But in the creative forms, in drama, in fiction, in poetry, the problem is different. Shakespeare, in *Henry IV*, has, speaking historically, made several errors. He has, for instance, shortened the time between the battles of Holmedon and Shrewsbury, he has represented Harry Percy as a young man, and he has merged the two Mortimers, uncle and nephew, into one figure. If this were history

and not drama, these changes would be serious mistakes. And some readers might be found to think them inexcusable in any circumstances. They are somewhat confusing to the person who knows the history of Hotspur's rebellion; but since *Henry IV* is a play and not a history, this confusion is more than compensated for by the artistic and dramatic value gained by the alterations. The shortening of the time of the action gives greater unity to the plot. The fusion of the two Mortimers concentrates in one figure the motives for opposition to King Henry and allegiance to the rebels. By making Hotspur coeval with Prince Hal rather than the King he places him, as has been said, "in a living and brilliant contrast to the other 'young Harry.'" ⁴ The spirit of the Percy rebellion is there in the play as truly as if the details had been correct, just as the emotional temper of the French Revolution is in Carlyle's account of it. Although we may not call them history, these books are substantially and spiritually true. And they picture men and life for us greatly. No one can forget the youthful and impetuous Hotspur, "tying [his] ear to no tongue but [his] own," or Robespierre, "the sea-green incorruptible."

Similarly in poetry it may be that under a great poem is an intellectual concept that the world has found false or outgrown. It may even be that the information is incorrect, as in Arnold's *Philomela*, in which he confuses Philomela and Procne. Winchester says, in speaking of Wordsworth's *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, that the central conception is false; the doctrine of pre-natal existence is

⁴ Verplanck, G. C. (ed.), *The Illustrated Shakespeare* (New York, 1847). Quoted by Rolfe, W. J. (ed.), *Henry the Fourth, Part I*, revised edition (American Book Co., [c 1904 and 1908]), p. 17.

"to say the best of it, of very doubtful truth," and the *Prometheus* is the "glorious imagined realization of an utterly false ideal."⁵ Each of these poems, he says, "is eminent in spite of the element of untruth in its central conception. More than that, this element of untruth is, in each case, just so much deduction from the permanent literary value of the poem."⁶ It seems, however, that these two poems are substantially true, even if the doctrine of pre-natal existence has never been proved and Shelley's social millennium can never be realized. In the case of Wordsworth's *Ode*, that doubtful doctrine is not the central conception; the poem is concerned, not with convincing anyone of its truth, but with pointing out the changes in the attitude of man toward nature as he proceeds from childhood through youth to manhood. The poet himself said, in the Fenwick note to the *Ode*, "I took hold of the notion of pre-existence as having sufficient foundation in humanity for authorizing me to make for my purpose the best use of it I could as a poet." He is using it merely as a symbol of the close union of the child with nature and God, and not as a principle in which he believes. Its doubtfulness, then, does not militate against the intellectual value of the poem as a whole. In like manner, although the impossible social millennium is the goal of Shelley's efforts, the central conception of the *Prometheus Unbound* is rather the power of love and brotherhood to unite men and to bring them nearer to that ideal state which he pictures in the last act of the drama. And the urging of effort toward a goal that is beyond us has a definite ethical and emotional value as well as an intellectual value. Browning realized this in art. The poem which

⁵ *Some Principles of Literary Criticism*, p. 153.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

contains the famous lines which respond to the spirit of Shelley in the *Prometheus*,

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for?

tells of Andrea del Sarto, "the faultless painter," who realized that his accuracy and perfection in drawing were not the greatest of qualities in art. He looks at a painting by Raphael.

Yonder's a work now, of that famous youth
The Urbinate who died five years ago.
(Tis copied, George Vasari sent it me.)
Well, I can fancy how he did it all,
Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,
Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him,
Above and through his art—for it gives way;
That arm is wrongly put—and there again—
A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,
Its body, so to speak: its soul is right,
He means right—that, a child may understand.
Still, what an arm! and I could alter it:
But all the play, the insight and the stretch—
Out of me, out of me!
..... And indeed the arm is wrong.
I hardly dare . . . yet, only you to see,
Give the chalk here—quick, thus the line should go!
Ay, but the soul! he's Rafael! rub it out!

Truth and accuracy, then, or truth and fact are not necessarily synonymous. Not all that is true is fact, and, conversely, not all that is fact is true in the larger sense. What is truth? Pilate's question is a difficult one to answer. The philosophers who have discussed it have suggested at least two main tests of the truth of statements of propositions or thoughts which we may apply to a study of the truth of literature. One test is that of the fidelity with which an original is copied, the degree to which original and copy correspond. This is usually

called the correspondence-notion of truth. The second, which is called the coherence-notion, regards the individual statement or idea as part of a complete system of truth, and measures its truthfulness by the degree to which it fits into that system or "coheres" with universal truth.

This is no place for an examination of these philosophical notions of the nature of truth. We can, however, use the tests in answering the important question which is to be asked of all literature: Is it true? As has been suggested in one summary of this problem, the solution perhaps does not lie in one theory or another, but in all; we may apply to any statement or thought that presents itself for examination each of these tests, and may find that each is useful. However this may be in matters of science, mathematics, or logic, such does seem to be the case in questions that relate to the ordinary experiences of life and by the same token of those of literature, which is an artistic expression of experience.

If literature is to be regarded thus, as the expression of experience, it is to be expected that it will correspond to that experience, which is the original of the book, as the sitter is the original of a portrait. All art, said Aristotle, is an imitation or representation of an object. His word *imitation*, taken out of its context and interpreted to mean the copying, not of nature but of other works of art, led to some of the artistic sins of the eighteenth century. But the critical principle that lay at the bottom of the mistake in the interpretation of Aristotle's statement, was at least a sound one. Said Pope, in the *Essay on Criticism*,

When first young Maro in his boundless mind
A work t'outlast immortal Rome design'd,
Perhaps he seem'd above the critic's law,

And but from Nature's fountains scorn'd to draw:
But when t'examine ev'ry part he came,
Nature and Homer were, he found, the same.

To be sure, such a doctrine led to the copying of Homer instead of Nature, and then to a copying of the copyer of Homer, so that sometimes a poem turned out to be "a copy of a copy of a copy." But the realization that Pope imputes to Vergil here, that Nature and Homer were the same, is the realization that should come to all of us when we "examine every part" of a masterpiece. The great artist makes his work "true to life."

This sounds very simple and easy from the critical standpoint. The difficulty arises when we try to determine what we mean by the phrase "true to life." What is a faithful copy of life,—*Main Street* or *Sard Harker*, *Pride and Prejudice* or *Ivanhoe*, *Madame Bovary* or *The Three Musketeers*? The answer seems to be: That depends,—not on whether a book is realistic or romantic, naturalistic or idealistic, but upon how true this expression of human experience is to the laws of human nature as we know it.

Realism as a method in literature and art has had a great vogue during the last two centuries, with frequent reactions against it when it went too far, to be sure, but with a constant strength which shows its validity and vitality as an artistic principle. Realism in art, of course, must be distinguished from realism as the philosopher regards it, although it is related to the philosophical doctrine. It has no connection with realism as opposed to nominalism, the mediæval doctrine that the universals, not the particulars, were real. It is closer to that other realism, opposed to idealism, which, in the words of Webster, is "the doctrine that in sense perception there is an immediate cognition of the external object, and our

knowledge of it is not mediate and representative." Webster's definition of realism in art and literature marks the connection: "representation without idealization, and making no appeal to the imagination." That is, the realist in art puts down immediately on canvas or paper his perception of the object, without interpreting it; he represents it directly, and endeavors to copy faithfully and exactly the scene, the event, the object, or the person. "We may define Realism," say the authors of a recent history of French literature, "as the art of representing actuality, viewed largely from the material standpoint, in a way to produce as closely as possible the impression of truth."⁷ The realist is concerned with details; he is a close and accurate observer, and he records the result of his observation often in its entirety and with the utmost fidelity. The minutiae of a day in the life of his hero may make up the entire novel of a modern realist. He is concerned with material things, and stresses the physiological as being actuality; he is interested in the physical sciences. His style and treatment are impersonal and objective, for he is representing reality, not interpreting it. His subject-matter is usually mediocrity, since that bulks largest in reality. The earlier work of Sinclair Lewis is an excellent example of modern realism. Naturalism is an extreme form of realism. The emphasis is put on the lower and coarser forms of life, and the manner of presentation, in accordance, is frequently disgusting. There is over-emphasis on physiological matters, on the human body and its functions, and "the physiological presentation of the Realists is pushed to a frequent and deliberate bestiality."⁸ The interest in facts overwhelms that in plot or character.

⁷ Nitze, W. A. and Dargan, E. Preston, *A History of French Literature* (Holt, 1922), p. 590.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 623-626.

The resulting spirit and tone of the work of the naturalists is pessimistic in the extreme. Regarding man as completely controlled by the laws of an unfeeling and brute nature, they are led to a fatalistic and deterministic view of life. Hence the work of the naturalists is depressing as well as disagreeable.

Realism and naturalism are the result of a natural and in some respects a healthy reaction against their opposites, romanticism and idealism, carried to extremes. The books that look for subject-matter not to reality but to the imaginations of their authors, that represent not men as they are but men as they never could be, ideally romantic heroes like those of Byron's verse tales or angelic little girls like Elsie Dinsmore, books that blink the facts of life or cover them up by sentimental euphemisms,—such books should bring a protest and a revolt. The artificial shepherds of the eighteenth century pastorals moved Crabbe, the realist, to indignant verse:

From Truth and Nature shall we widely stray,
Where Virgil, not where Fancy, leads the way?
.....I paint the Cot,
As Truth will paint it, and as Bards will not.*

The romantic absurdities of Gothic fiction led Jane Austen to subtle satire and parody and to realism.

But the question which faces us here, in considering the intellectual qualities of literature, is this: which is more true to life, the romantic or the realistic, the idealistic or the naturalistic? Truth, comes the answer, does not depend on such methods but on something much more fundamental. The romance may be just as true as the realistic novel; the idealist may look at life as truly as the naturalist. The point is that human life and

* *The Village.*

human experience, which is the stuff of literature, is a complex thing: it is neither wholly material nor wholly spiritual; it is neither completely absorbed in the details of physical existence nor entirely given over to dreams of a strange and romantic life. It is compounded of divine ideals and animal desires, of large visions and of anxiety and trouble about many things. Hence the book that represents only one side of this compound experience contains only a part of the truth. The realist's picture of human life is as incomplete as that of the romanticist. Both may be equally true as far as they go, but they do not go all the way. Neither the thoroughgoing romanticist nor the thoroughgoing realist has ever produced the greatest literature. To see life steadily and see it whole is the ideal of the great writer. That is what Sophocles and Homer and Shakespeare and Dante have done. The realization of such balance and harmony lies, perhaps, at the basis of the identification of ideal truth and ideal beauty which Keats made:

'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

That is, truth in literature, or reality—not realism in the narrow sense—is that fidelity to the laws of human experience which may be found in the midst of strange lands and amazing adventures as well as in the small town or the slums of a great city and the dull or sordid details of everyday living. The characters in Scott's romantic novels (with the exception of his fine ladies) are as real as those in Jane Austen's realistic pictures of village life. The test of reality in a character is largely the personal feeling of the reader. He realizes, without proving the matter to himself, that Jeanie Deans or Elizabeth Bennett is a real woman. If he is familiar with

psychology, he will see that all her actions are just those that are to be expected from a person described as Scott or Jane Austen has described her. He will find that he does not come to know her all at once, to see all there is to see from one point of view, as if she were a flat paper doll fastened to the page of the book. She stands out from the page, and it is necessary to walk all around her to see the whole of her. Her face is not stamped once for all at the beginning of the story; her expression changes with varying moods. As in the case of your friends, you are never perfectly sure what she is going to do next, although when she does it, you realize that she would not have done otherwise. This is reality of character; this is what brings from your intellect an immediate recognition of truth, whether you find it in the eighth century B. C. or the twentieth century A. D., in Persia or America, on a desert island or in Gopher Prairie. The externals may be strange to you. A Russian novel may at first seem to be about people the like of whom you have never known. But scratch a Russian and you will find not a Tartar, but a human being, who, if his creator is a genius, will act in accordance with the laws of human nature that make all men, though East be East and West be West, brothers under the skin.

Many of the same things may be said of truth in other points beside character. An event or a series of events in history may be truly represented even if the representation is not accurate in every detail. The account of Percy's rebellion in *Henry IV*, as has already been said, is essentially true. On the other hand, a mere chronicle might not be nearly so true. As Joachim says,

And though a chronicle may, from one point of view, 'correspond' detail for detail with the historical events, yet for its reader, even if not for its writer, it may be radically false. For it

may entirely miss the 'significance' of the piece of history, and so convey a thoroughly false impression.¹⁰

In like manner, a narrative of fictitious events must be, not a mere panorama, but, to give the illusion of reality, an interpretation. Descriptions of scenes or objects that are thoroughly realistic may be really false. Photographs, even though they picture accurately each feature, may lie; they may fail to represent anything but the externals, which are not always true symbols of the character within. Peter Bell was at first a thorough realist; in Wordsworth's opinion he knew nothing of the inner truth about nature:

A primrose by a river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him
And it was nothing more.

Minute external detail may be very valuable in producing the illusion of reality, as Defoe and Swift, for instance, well knew. But they selected significant detail, and so interpreted the scene into which they put Crusoe or Gulliver. Mere photographic realism, without interpretation, is not enough to produce either reality or art.¹¹ And a scene may be made just as real by the use of suggestion, by creating atmosphere, as we say, as by presenting details. This is true of Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale*, of which the setting is absolutely convincing.

When we come to examine the truth of ideas in litera-

¹⁰ Joachim, Harold H., *The Nature of Truth* (Oxford University Press, 1906), p. 16.

¹¹ The question as to whether photographic representation is art or not, though allied to the question of its service in producing an impression of truth, is another problem, that of the imaginative treatment of material, which will be considered in a later chapter. Suffice it to say here that photography becomes an art when the selective powers of the photographer are brought into play, and in developing and printing a negative he deepens a shadow here or removes a line there. It is doubtful whether the grapes of Zeuxis were the highest art.

ture, we approach a problem that is much more philosophical and more difficult of solution. Here the correspondence test is harder to apply, for it is difficult to find an original for an abstract thought. We may find an original for such an idea as that the base angles of an isosceles triangle are equal, for it belongs to external experience. But where shall we find the original of the thought that "A thing of beauty is a joy forever"? It must be sought in the inward human experience. If we have ever found in the song of a bird that beauty which brings joy and solace and have felt, however indistinctly, that in that song is something that transcends the limits of the here and now, our minds are ready to leap to a recognition of the truth of Keats' *Ode* as corresponding to human experience. If we have never had such thoughts ourselves, but if our imaginations are active, the poem may give us that thought for the first time and with it a flashing and instantaneous recognition of its reality. If the poem, provided that it be thoroughly understood, cannot do that for us, then poetry, alas! is not for us. Unfortunately there are such people in the world.

A test of the truth of a thought or idea that may prove simpler and easier of application is that of coherence. Is it consistent with the rest of our thinking, with the whole body of truth as we know it? Is there anything in Keats' conception of beauty as an eternal joy and solace and of the nightingale as a symbol of that beauty as it is to be found in nature, which contradicts the universal truth in men's ideas about the manifestations and the function of beauty? In details, to be sure, there may be contradictions. Keats' bird is not the same as that of Milton, "most musical, most melancholy," nor that of Arnold, whose song is "eternal passion, eternal

pain," nor yet again that of Coleridge, "the merry nightingale." But whatever the nature of the bird's song, in the last analysis, it represents to each of these poets, as it does to all men who have ears to hear, beauty and joy. The themes of Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies fit into our scheme of thinking and knowledge about human nature. The characters of his plays too contradict in no way, although they may be idealized, our experience with men and women. On the other hand, Byron's *Giaour* and *Corsair* are compounds of romantic qualities never found in the whole system of human life, and a little girl who, refusing to play the piano on Sunday, sits on the stool until she faints, contradicts our experience with little girls.

There are, of course, some books that, by intention, are not consistent with life as we know it. Fairy tales, myths, hero legends, and all other tales of sheer fancy, contradict the laws of nature. Yet these books, at least the good ones, have an internal consistency; they are perfectly logical according to their own laws. Once we accept the premise on which they are based, we can find no fault in their procedure. Before we read *The Ancient Mariner*, there is necessary that "willing suspension of disbelief," which, according to Coleridge himself, constitutes poetic faith. That faith makes it possible for us to accept little creatures as big as our thumbs, or gods that come down to earth and visit the humble cottage of Baucis and Philemon, or heroes like Cuchullain, who can make ready a bridge before himself, by the mere act of stepping forth. Having once accepted them, our minds are perfectly satisfied with their subsequent acts as the logical results of their natures. If it is possible for a little girl to fall down a rabbit hole or climb through a mirror, then all the things that happened to Alice, in *Wonderland*

or in the Looking-glass Country, are quite reasonable. Indeed, even if it is not possible, there should be no intellectual difficulty, for these are events which have all the logical illogicality of dreams, and Alice was asleep. It was a mathematician, a man belonging to the profession generally reputed to be above all logical, who wrote those classics for children young and old. Likewise, in a book not intended for children, if we once admit that it is possible for angels to descend to earth, bury their sky robes, and sojourn with traveling Irish tinkers, all the actions and the characteristics of James Stephens' demigods are perfectly logical. In every great book of fancy there is something which produces the illusion of internal logicity.¹² Yet the fanciful,—delightful and valuable in its own way as it may be—is usually too far removed from real life to belong to the greatest literature. *Alice in Wonderland* is not so great as *Adam Bede*, nor *The Demi-Gods* as *Vanity Fair*. These books have a truth of their own, a consistency within their fictional world, but that world does not correspond or cohere with the actual world of our experience. Hence they are not in a real sense true to life. This statement will hold, of course, only in the case of books of sheer fancy. The Homeric poems, although they deal with gods and heroes and monsters and chimeras dire, unite the fanciful with a truth to human life that puts them in the topmost rank of literature.¹³

Thus far the discussion has been of the nature of the truth expressed in literature. The value of that truth is

¹² After this passage was written, I read Professor J. L. Lowes' admirable discussion of the treatment of the ethical background in *The Ancient Mariner* which gives "the illusion of inevitable sequence to that superb inconsequence." See *The Road to Xanadu* (Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1927), pp. 295-303.

¹³ Professor Lowes has pointed out (*loc. cit.*) the use which Coleridge made of "the known and familiar landscape" of human life.

an additional question.¹⁴ The value of clear, logical, and independent thought in helping the reader to thinking that shall be clear, logical, and independent has already been suggested. So has the value of information as a means of enlarging the mental equipment. The joy of contact with a mind that is rich in knowledge and that controls that knowledge with lucidity, coherence, and originality is an intellectual stimulus of the utmost value. It brings not only satisfaction but growth.

It is, perhaps, a truism to say that all truth is valuable. The value of the truth expressed, however, will vary in degree. Gray's poem on the cat that was drowned in the tub of goldfishes is true enough, and it contains several subordinate truths, such as the proverbial "All that glitters is not gold," and the conclusion that "a favorite has no friend." Yet its intellectual value is not very great. We enjoy it as a clever bit of humorous verse, but it makes no profound impression on our minds, nor does it stir us to thought. His *Elegy*, on the other hand, may well move us to ponder on the brevity of human life. Most great books and poems set for us a problem of some sort which urges us to mental activity. Those problems which touch the deepest interests of our lives, not necessarily those which call for the most rapid and energetic thought at the time, are the ones whose contemplation will prove most valuable for us. A mystery story may make our minds work hard, but the problem does not touch us nearly and does not stay with us. The plays of Shakespeare, on the other hand, contain problems that deal with the fundamentals of

¹⁴ The distinction should be made here between the purely intellectual value of a book, or its effect on the mind of the reader, and the ethical value, or the effect which the truth it expresses may have upon his conduct. The latter belongs properly in the next chapter.

our lives and of the lives of all men, the problems of ambition and revenge and relationship with our fellows, the problems of right and happy living, that are with us always and are ever pressing for solution. It is evident that the nearer the problem comes to being a universal one, the greater its intellectual value, and we remember that universality of appeal is one of the marks of the greatest literature. It is also evident that the more the problem concerns not our intellectual life only but our conduct, the more important it becomes for us and for everyone. Thus, although we began by endeavoring to separate intellectual from ethical value, we see that in the last analysis they are closely related, and that the literature that contains truths which will be sure guides for life is the literature that, other things being equal, will be most valuable. It is evident, too, that, as Winchester has said, "All deep and sane emotional effects arise from some profound truth."¹⁵ So the emotional value as well as the ethical is bound up with the intellectual worth of great books. The writer does not always solve the problem which he sets; he cannot. If he could, there would have been an end of the necessity of thinking long ago. Part of our purpose in reading must be to force our too often sluggish minds to grapple with the problems which our geniuses place in vivid form before us and carry them on toward the goal of a solution at least for our own selves.

It was said early in this chapter that there were certain types of literature in which the intellectual element was stressed. It may also be said that there is a certain kind of writing which is found in all types of literature, fiction, drama, poetry, essays, even staid history and biography at times, which has a very definite intellectual appeal,

¹⁵ *Some Principles of Literary Criticism*, p. 149.

and which is so important that it deserves separate consideration here,—that is, humor.

Most writers are agreed that humor appeals to the intellect rather than to the emotions. Meredith says of the Comic Spirit, "It laughs through the mind, for the mind directs it; and it might be called the humour of the mind." "The test of true Comedy is that it shall awaken thoughtful laughter."¹⁶ And Bergson maintains that the appeal of the comic is to the intelligence.¹⁷ It is the mind that laughs when a man falls; the minute the spectator realizes that he is hurt and the emotions are aroused, the humor disappears from the situation. If this is true in so low a form of the sense of humor, it is obviously true of the higher forms as well.

Most authorities, too, agree that the basis of humor is incongruity. They say it in different fashions, but what they say comes eventually to the same point. The Comic Spirit, says Meredith, perceives contrasts. When men wax out of proportion, are affected or hypocritical, or are self-deceived or hoodwinked, or are at variance with their professions, when they offend sound reason and fair justice, when they are false in humility or mired with conceit, the Comic Spirit laughs.¹⁸ Bergson says that the comic effect is due to inelasticity, to the resemblance of the human body to a machine. "The attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine."¹⁹ "Any incident is comic that calls our attention to the physical in a person, when it is the moral side that is concerned."²⁰ "We laugh every time a person gives us the impression of being a thing."²¹ "Any

¹⁶ *An Essay on Comedy*, p. 82.

¹⁷ *Laughter*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. 83-84.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 29.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

arrangement of acts and events is comic which gives us, in a single combination, the illusion of life and the distinct impression of a mechanical arrangement.”²² And Elizabeth Woodbridge, summing up her discussion of the nature and sources of comic effect, says, “We have seen that comic effects have a common basis in incongruity, contrast; that the incongruity may lie principally in the realm of events, and we have comic intrigue, or in the realm of appearances, and we have comic character.”²³

This incongruity may be readily illustrated in the realm of everyday experience. The contrast between the sneeze in church and the solemnity of the atmosphere, between the unwieldy bulk of the fat man and his efforts at speed in running after his hat, between the solemn face of the raconteur and the stories that he tells without a smile, between the words of a Dogberry and his obvious lack of education,—all these move laughter to a greater or less degree. And the writers of humorous literature understand this.

There may be incongruity of situation, as in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, where the contrast suggested by the very title leads to all sorts of absurdities. The picture of Lancelot and Galahad on bicycles is comic; the modern screen version of the story mounted them on motor-cycles. Or there may be the contrast and incongruity which comes from repetition and reiteration in a situation, as in the scene between Shylock and Tubal in *The Merchant of Venice*, where the constant reiteration of Shylock's double lament for his daughter and his ducats, and the repeated contrast between the two losses make for humor. Or there is the

²² *Laughter*, p. 69.

²³ *The Drama: Its Law and its Technique*, p. 67.

inverted situation, where the biter is bit, the boaster is brought low, the churl is put into a high position, in which the incongruity is sometimes double. The comic strips often employ this device, and much of slapstick comedy depends on it. But high comedy also makes use of it, as in the story of Malvolio, the elevation of Christopher Sly, or the scene in which Falstaff plays King Henry.

The incongruity may also lie in the character itself, as in the contrasts between the age and the dignified pretensions of the hero of *Seventeen*, or between the physical size and the mental agility of Falstaff, or between the bold words and the cowardly actions of Bobadill.

The incongruity may also be verbal. This is responsible for much unconscious humor, such, for instance, as that which lightens the labors of the teacher of literature, when a student tells him on an examination paper that *The Blessed Damozel* is a poem about a girl who had died and could hardly wait until her lover came so that she could show him around Heaven. The incongruity between a sightseeing bus and Rossetti's Heaven is truly ludicrous. So is the picture of a Ford coupé on the meads conjured up by the misquotation of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, "I took her up into the seat beside me." This kind of humor is made conscious use of by those writers who retell old stories of dignity in modern slang or dialect, or who write parodies of famous poems. It is apt to make the lover of literature shudder rather than laugh. It is not the highest form of humor, for it degrades something that in itself is beautiful. Then there is the kind of verbal humor that lies in the use or misuse of individual words. There is incongruity between the two meanings of a word as in the case of puns, or between the intended

word and that substituted for it. There are many Malaprops in the world. And the humor of a Malapropism is greater when the substituted word, although incongruous with the intended word, has at the same time a strange suitability with the context. For instance, a Mrs. Malaprop in the nursing profession reached the height of the amusing when she said that she had been trained in a hospital for the insanitary. Similarly the humor of the following statement, attributed on good authority to an actual college student, lies not merely in the mistake but in the absurd appropriateness of the two substituted words: "When Achilles was a child, his mother dipped him in the Stynx, and ever after he was intolerable." These, we would believe, are instances of unconscious humor. But the writers of comedy seize upon this device and make excellent use of it. Mrs. Malaprop is always amusing, and seldom more so than when she prides herself on "a nice derangement of epitaphs." Dogberry's "Comparisons are odorous" is deservedly popular. There are many other verbal devices: the exaltation of an idea by a word that is too big for it, as in the mock-heroic generally or in the "white and shining ossifications" in the mouths of Lamb's chimney-sweepers or the "exterior tegument" of his roast pig; the transposition of diction from one key to another, as so often happens in Byron's *Don Juan*; the unexpected antitheses of Pope's *Rape of the Lock*,

Whether the nymph shall break Diana's law,
Or some frail China jar receive a flaw;
Or stain her honor, or her new brocade;
Forget her prayers, or miss a masquerade;
Or lose her heart, or necklace, at a ball;
Or whether Heav'n has doom'd that Shock must fall;

or the anticlimax of his

Sooner let earth, air, sea, to chaos fall,
Men, monkeys, lap-dogs, parrots, perish all!

or the surprising inversion of Dryden's

The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,
But Shadwell never deviates into sense.

And there are the finer effects of humor, humor that is sometimes near allied to the emotions: situations like that in *Twelfth Night*, where the sympathies are enlisted; characters like Don Quixote, whom, in spite of his absurdities, you love; delicate phrasing that puts smiles and tears very close together, as in the passage from Lamb's *Dream Children*:

Then I told what a tall, upright, graceful person their great-grandmother Field once was; and how in her youth she was esteemed the best dancer—here Alice's little right foot played an involuntary movement, till upon my looking grave, it desisted—the best dancer, I was saying, in the county, till a cruel disease, called a cancer, came, and bowed her down with pain.

The laughable takes many forms in literature, of which the chief are comedy in drama and fiction, satire, and parody. The first of these appeals usually to the emotions as well as to the intellect, the second may have an ethical as well as an intellectual value, and the third appeals to nothing but the intellect. There is much confusion among the words that are associated with humor. What, for instance, is the difference between wit and humor? We can say that Falstaff is both a witty and a humorous character. He is humorous because we laugh at him by reason of the incongruities in his person and character, and he is witty because we laugh with him by reason of the nimbleness of his mind. He is humorous in the scene of the rob-

bery at Gadshill, but he is wholly witty when he tells the story of it to Prince Hal.²⁴

Finally, what of the intellectual value of humor, and of its literary value? The value of the lower forms, of slapstick comedy and the comic strips of the daily papers, is very doubtful. Its appeal is usually to the groundlings, to those whose sense of humor is limited to the appreciation of merely physical incongruity. It is usually vulgar and vulgarizing. But humor of a higher type, the humor of great characters like Falstaff, of great plays like *Much Ado About Nothing*, of verbal wit, enlarges and stimulates our mental activity. It brings us new mental food, it makes our own minds more nimble, it nourishes and strengthens and refreshes. And beyond mere intellectual effect, it quickens also our sympathies. And it may, through the special offices of satire, stir us to a desire of amending the faults of humanity; it may even show us ourselves as in a mirror and bring us to clear vision and humility of mind. It, as well as tragedy, purges its beholders of that which it represents.

²⁴ For a useful distinction among other related words, like satire, sarcasm, and irony, see Fowler, H. W., *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (Oxford, the Clarendon Press, 1926), p. 241.

CHAPTER IV

ETHICAL VALUE

THE ethical value of literature has more frequently been a storm center of criticism than either of the other content values. In behalf of the emotional appeal of good books there will be little need of argument: virtually everyone will agree that they must arouse the emotions; there will be need only of discussion of the nature of that appeal. But emphasis on the ethical significance of literature has frequently been derided, just as it has been frequently vigorously demanded. "Art for Art's sake" has been a cry that has been often raised, especially in modern times, and it has been countered by the answers of great men from Plato to Tolstoi.

As we look back over the history of criticism, we find that the Greeks laid great stress on the ethical importance and significance of literature. Plato, considering that the function of literature was to represent what was worthy of imitation by the youth of his ideal Republic, condemns poetry and drama as a whole both as representing unworthy objects and as, at best, representing only the outsides of things, not their true essentials. Religion and patriotism are the only two subjects for poetry that escape his strictures; hymns to the gods and poems in praise of heroes he will accept.¹ Although others do not go with Plato to the length of banishing poets from so-

¹ R. L. Nettleship, in his *Lectures on the Republic of Plato* (London, Macmillan, 1920), makes an interesting point in comparing the drama of Plato's day to the novel of his own. See p. 351.

ciety, this prepossession with the ethical aspects of literature is characteristic of all Greek critics with the exception of Longinus; their criticism is ethical, not literary. Their attitude is the natural result of their fusion of the beautiful and the good, καλὸν κ'ἀγαθόν. The preoccupation of the Romans with rhetoric and style prevents their discussing to any extent the values of literary content, but their literature itself shows a strong ethical tendency. The stress that the Middle Ages, under patristic influence, laid upon allegorical interpretation shows their eagerness to prove that the work of the older writers was of moral import. The absurd interpretations of the *Aeneid*, for instance, as an allegory of man's life attribute to Vergil a stronger ethical purpose than that which he indubitably had. And Dante's great poem had a definite moral and religious aim. By the time that the Renaissance had broken away into the realm of pure beauty, the puritanical opposition to drama and poetry as a whole had forced its advocates to defend it on the ground that its double function was that of delight and instruction. Many quotations from the English writers of the sixteenth century illustrate this point. Sidney, in his *Apology for Poetry*, written in reply to Stephen Gosson's *School of Abuse*, says poesy is "an art of imitation . . . with this end, to teach and delight." "I think it may be manifest," he says in another passage, "that the Poet, with that same hand of delight, doth draw the mind more effectually than any other art doth: and so a conclusion not unfitly ensueth, that, as Virtue is the most excellent resting place for all worldly learning to make his end of, so Poetry, being the most familiar to teach it, and most princely to move towards it, in the most excellent work is the most excellent workman." "The right use of poetry," wrote Webbe in his *Discourse of English Poetry*

of 1586, "is . . . to mingle profit with pleasure, and so to delight the reader with the pleasantness of his art, as in the meantime his mind may be well instructed with knowledge and wisdom." But as the seventeenth century wore on, there came a rebellion against this idea, which, perhaps, in the case of these apologists for poetry was largely a means of defence, and we find Dryden saying that "delight is the chief, if not the only, end of poesy: instruction can be admitted but in the second place; for poesy only instructs as it delights."²

We might continue this historical summary, noting the didactic poetry of the eighteenth century in England, poetry of a distinctly religious and moral tone, the strong ethical tendency of Wordsworth, the stress on morals and ethics in the work of the Victorians, both in prose and in poetry. We should have to note too a growing tendency on the part of criticism to lay increasing emphasis on the side of delight rather than instruction, in spite of the stress on ethics in creative work,—or perhaps because of it—and the appearance from time to time of individuals or groups whose theory of art is that it is absolutely unmoral. This latter tendency seems very strong today, both in creative and in critical writing. Mr. Spingarn, the expressionist, in *The New Criticism*, writes as follows:

We have done with all moral judgment of literature. . . . Romantic criticism first enunciated the principle that art has no aim except expression; that its aim is complete when expression is complete; that 'beauty is its own excuse for being.' It is not the function of poetry to further any moral or social cause, any more than it is the function of bridge-building to further the cause of Esperanto. If the achievement of the poet be to express any material he may select, and to express it with a completeness that we recognize as perfection, obviously morals can play no part

² *A Defence of an Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, 1668.

in the judgment which Criticism may form of his work. To say that poetry is moral or immoral is as meaningless as to say that an equilateral triangle is moral and an isosceles triangle immoral, or to speak of the immorality of a musical chord or a Gothic arch. It is only conceivable in a world in which dinner table conversation runs after this fashion: 'This cauliflower would be good if it had only been prepared in accordance with international law.' 'Do you know why my cook's pastry is so good? Because he has never told a lie or seduced a woman.' We do not concern ourselves with morals when we test the engineer's bridge or the scientist's researches; indeed we go farther, and say that it is the moral duty of the scientist to disregard any theory of morals in his search for truth. Beauty's world is remote from both these standards; she aims neither at morals nor at truth. Her imaginary creations, by definition, make no pretense to reality, and cannot be judged by reality's tests. The poet's only moral duty, as a poet, is to be true to his art, and to express his vision of reality as well as he can. If the ideals enunciated by poets are not those which we admire most, we must blame not the poets but ourselves: in the world where morals count we have failed to give them the proper material out of which to rear a nobler edifice. No critic of authority now tests literature by the standards of ethics."

There are spokesmen for the other side too; the late Stuart P. Sherman, in *The Genius of America*,⁴ said, "Beauty, whether we like it or not, has a heart full of service. Emancipated, she will still be seeking some vital activity."⁵ And again: "In an unfinished world, where religion has become so largely a matter of traditional sentiments and observances, poetry has a work to do, poetry of any high seriousness."⁶ Although Mr. Sherman's point of view broadened during the last few years

³ *Creative Criticism*, pp. 31-34. The passage is greatly expanded from its original form. It is a modification of a passage in an article, "The Seven Arts and the Seven Confusions," in *The Seven Arts*, March, 1917. Mr. Spingarn's argument I shall examine later.

⁴ Originally published under the title of *The National Genius* in the *Atlantic Monthly*, January, 1921. Reprinted as the title essay in *The Genius of America* (Scribner, 1923).

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

of his life, he never abandoned this attitude. Contemporary creative work, fiction and drama even more than poetry, bears out his thesis as well as that of Mr. Spingarn.

As we examine the history of the subject, we see that attacks upon literature from an ethical point of view have been of three kinds. There have been denunciations of the immorality of literature as a whole (for to the Greeks and to the puritans of the Renaissance, poetry and drama were virtually co-extensive with literature); there have been attacks upon literature which did not teach a definite moral lesson; and there have been attacks upon immoral books. The first of these is merely a literary and critical curiosity at this time, for no one today considers literature as a whole ethically detrimental. The other two questions are still of significance, however: the second because many people tend to associate art with morals and there is a strong and fairly wide-spread feeling that art should be didactic; the third because, although probably nobody would hold a brief for literature that is degrading morally, there is wide difference of opinion as to what constitutes immorality in a book. These two problems, then, must be considered, and after them the question—not to be confused with the problem of didacticism—whether great literature has and should have a positive ethical value.

Some of the great literature of the world has been professedly and intentionally didactic. There have been many poems, especially among those of perhaps second rank, which have sought to teach the principles of right conduct, individual and social. There have been novels and plays of definite purpose and propaganda. There have been prose works in the form of essays or lectures that inculcate personal and social morality. Often ethics has

gone hand in hand with allegory; often it has been associated with religious teaching; sometimes it has taken upon itself the garb of satire. A partial list of English titles will suggest the wide variety and the frequently high literary value of didactic writings: *Piers the Plowman*, *Everyman*, *The Regiment of Princes*, *The Faerie Queene*, More's *Utopia* and all the other Utopias of literary history, Bacon's *Essays*, which teach a very practical and sometimes materialistic morality, Taylor's *Holy Living*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Pope's *Moral Essays*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Rasselas*, *The Deserted Village*, *The Excursion*, *Prometheus Unbound*, *Past and Present*, *Oliver Twist*, *Mary Barton*, *Felix Holt*, *Daniel Deronda*, *The Egoist*, *Sesame and Lilies*, *Culture and Anarchy*, *David Grieve*, *The Forsyte Saga*, *Strife*, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, *The Devil's Disciple*. These titles are all taken from British literature; the reader will think of other books from other lands, such as the *Myths of Plato*, *The Divine Comedy*, the plays of Ibsen, some of the work of Voltaire, and the *Essays* of Emerson. To all these authors, the didactic purpose of their writing was of great importance. Sometimes they said nothing about it, sometimes they expressed that aim in specific words. Let two examples suffice. Spenser, in the letter to Sir Walter Raleigh which serves as preface to *The Faerie Queene*, "expounding his whole intention in the course of this worke," says, "The generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline." Shaw, in the Preface to his "unpleasant" plays, says that he is using their dramatic power to compel the audience to look at unpleasant facts. He wishes the spectators to realize that the responsibility for the evils which he is depicting in these three plays rests quite as much upon them as upon those who are repre-

sented on the stage as responsible. For it is only through their action as citizens that social wrongs can be replaced by decent, honest, and humane conditions.

With all this array before us of novels, poems, plays, and essays which are intentionally written for the purpose of inculcating morality, and are at the same time recognized as being good literature, we must be careful how we condemn didacticism and take up the cudgels against that large body of readers, past and present, who have defended and demanded it. Obviously didacticism may have a place in art. Just as obviously it is not necessary to great art; absent from the above roll call are some of the greatest names in literature, Homer, Goethe, Shakespeare. We must, therefore, examine some of these books and see what place didacticism has in art and what its relationship may be to the other qualities that make a book great.

Everyman admittedly stands out from among the other morality plays of its time as the greatest of them all. This is not because the moral lesson that it teaches is greater than that taught by other moralities. The characteristics that definitely put it above its fellows are the reality and individuality of the abstractions that make up its *dramatis personæ*, the touches of delightful humor, and the charm of that scene at the grave. That is, its greatness is independent of its didacticism. Is it great in spite of its didacticism? Let us examine some of the other books before we answer that question.

The Faerie Queene is one of the supreme poems of English literature, not because its "generall end . . . is to fashion a gentleman." Many are the "conduct books" of the sixteenth century. Spenser's poem far outvalues them all because of the charm of the chivalric romance, the music of his chosen stanza, and the fact that, as Pro-

fessor Legouis has said, he is the greatest painter who never held a brush. Why does *Prometheus Unbound* surpass Shelley's own earlier poem, *The Revolt of Islam*, which inculcates the same lesson of human brotherhood? Because of the glory of its imagery and music. The value of *Oliver Twist* lies in its characterization, not in its advocacy of social reform. *Past and Present* has not merely its gospel of work to commend it, but even more its amazing and inspiring style. On the other hand, *Rasselas* is dull and pedestrian because its people have no life and the significance of its ethical lesson cannot save it. Many of Shaw's plays read rather like social tracts than like representations of life. The path of the history of books for children is strewn with the dry bones of didacticism. Fortunately we no longer offer almost exclusively to our children moralizing books like *Sandford and Merton* or Maria Edgeworth's *Moral Tales*. But those of us who are in middle life will recall the series of volumes about a youthful hero or heroine in which, at the end, the wicked ceased to flourish like a green bay tree and virtue,—impossible virtue, often—though long persecuted, was duly rewarded.

The case against didacticism rests on the evidence that too often, when it is not employed by an artist, it distorts or even destroys the life and reality of a book. Even in Shaw's work, the ill effects of social propaganda are too evident; Mrs. Warren is not so real a woman as Candida. That story or poem or drama in which the moral outweighs and overshadows the intellectual and emotional power and the beauty of content or form, will be little better than an ethical tract. Yet the examples that have been adduced demonstrate that a definite moral purpose, properly subordinated, although perhaps no help, need be no impediment to greatness. Beauty

of form, vividness of character drawing, universality of noble thought, power and richness of emotion will counteract the deadening effect of mere didacticism. Even more, they will give to the ethical lesson beauty and significance and force; a bald moral is transfigured into a mighty agency for social and individual betterment. On the other hand, it is also clear that a definite moral lesson is not necessary in great art. It must be understood, however, that this statement is not equivalent to saying that a positive ethical *value* is not necessary in supreme literature. That question has yet to be considered. Before we approach it, there is another problem of negatives to be discussed.

Judgment as to what constitutes immorality in literature has varied greatly at different times in the world's history. It differs among different peoples and in different strata of society. This variation in ethical standards for books has corresponded, of course, to the variation in the social code. This point must be clearly understood first of all. What was accepted without question in the speech of good society naturally was not quarrelled with when it appeared in books. Profanity in novels may reflect profanity in the social circles those novels describe. Extreme reticence in the speech of fiction may be what is demanded by the social code of the times. When the physical was spoken of in the Victorian period, it was cloaked in phrases that were intended to give it a less fleshly quality. *Legs* were *limbs*. The girls brought up in a certain church school for young ladies in the South were taught that horses sweat, men perspire, and ladies get all over in a glow. The facts of sex, certainly at least in mixed company and in the presence of unmarried women, were treated in like manner. Between the frankness of the eighteenth century and that of the twentieth

came the reticence of the nineteenth, with its bated breath and its euphemistic phraseology that deceived nobody. Consequently the open speaking of much of the fiction of today may easily shock the reader who was born in the nineteenth century, for it represents something that was not considered "nice" in the days of his upbringing.

But this particular brand of "niceness" and morality are not necessarily synonymous, nor does frankness of speech constitute immorality. Indeed it seems fairly clear that it is healthier to speak frankly of than to cover up the facts of life. The rather trite statement that when light is thrown into dark corners the harm and evil disappear, has truth to justify its repetition. The use of concealing phrases, which probably deceived nobody, was often far more suggestive, far more over-stimulating to the youthful imagination, than modern frankness. Of course what has just been said applies to the vocabulary which deals with the normal and natural and healthy facts of life. When language goes beyond that and expresses abnormality and so gives the reader unhealthy information and over-stimulates the morbid imagination, then it is immoral. Its aim becomes not that of expressing truth, however much a writer may try to deceive both himself and his readers by claiming that such is the case, but pornography. Nor should we ever advocate or condone the use of frank speech which is evidently the result of a desire to shock, to show off,—in short, which has its origin not in healthy honesty but in mere bad taste. The conclusion of this matter of morality or immorality in expression is that it is not so much a question of the words that are used as of the purpose for which they are used.

What shall be said of writers like Rabelais and Sterne,

who frequently violate the canons of good taste and write indecently? *Pantagruel* and *Tristram Shandy* are not, as wholes, immoral books. Although portions of them may be called indecent, they contain sufficient value, intellectual, emotional,—yes, even ethical—to outweigh the questionable passages. Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim will make us shut our eyes to a world of asterisks.

In the second place, a book whose theme is immorality is not necessarily an immoral book. Look back over the history of literature and see how many of the great books of the world do *not* deal with vice or crime in some form. There are very few. Murder, rape, incest, adultery,—from the time of “the tale of Troy divine” down to our own Hardy or Masfield or Robinson, these have been the subjects of great novels and dramas and poems. Were we to reject as immoral all the literature which dealt with vice and crime, we should put ourselves in the position of Plato or of the sixteenth century puritans and should have to banish creative writing almost as a whole. Obviously the *Iliad*, the *Œdipous Tyrannos*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Vanity Fair*, *Adam Bede*, *Tess of the d’Urber-villes* are not immoral books.

And yet there are some books that deal with these same subjects that may be called immoral. What makes the difference? The difference lies in the purpose and aim of the writer and in his emphasis. The problem is similar to that of the phraseology.

If the aim of the writer is to focus the attention of his readers upon evil, merely for evil’s sake, his purpose is degrading. Everyone knows enough about psychology to realize that constant dwelling on evil things is apt to lead to evil actions. The effect of certain moving pictures upon the minds of growing boys has been to start some of them on a career of crime. In this simian world of ours, human

nature is highly imitative; what we see on screen or stage, what we read of in book or magazine or newspaper, is very apt, in the case of a nature predisposed to lack of moral balance, to cause the turning of the scale.

The books that make vice or crime attractive, too, have an immoral effect. The realist will say, of course, with Mr. Mencken, that vice does attract more often than not, and that therefore the artist, portraying reality, should represent its attractiveness. This is all true enough, as far as it goes. But the attractiveness of vice is not the whole truth about it. Great writers often have presented vice as attractive, but if they are truly great they have also presented the ashes to which it so often turns if we yield to its lure. Becky Sharp had a glorious time, King Lear's wicked daughters enjoyed their undisputed power, Helen, for a time at least, was duly thrilled over her elopement with Paris. But Rawdon Crawley turned like the proverbial worm, Cordelia's was truly the greater peace at the last, and Helen was overtaken by the Trojan War or perhaps only by disillusionment. This does not mean that each of these books has a moral. They represent the whole of life, which usually includes reaction and sometimes retribution.

In fact the crux of the problem seems to lie in the matter of the proportion and emphasis of the treatment, which is fundamentally a result of the purpose and aim of the writer. As the charge of immorality is more frequently brought against books that deal with sexual irregularity than those whose subject is murder or theft or arson or any other social crime ("which," says W. L. George, "as everybody knows, are perfectly moral things to write about"!), let us take as an example such a novel. A story has appeared comparatively recently which

⁷ *Literary Chapters*, p. 131.

takes for its subject the growth and the satisfaction of illicit love. At the end of the book, the injured wife gives her husband his freedom, and the lovers accept the sacrifice as the normal and natural and perfectly right thing. Now, to the subject-matter as such there is no valid objection, nor even to the frankness and fullness of the description in it. The uncleanness of this book seems to me to rest upon two counts: the calm selfishness of the two lovers, which brings no hint of criticism from their creator, and the almost exclusive emphasis on the physical. The only bond between the man and woman in this story is that of physical desire and passion; there is no suggestion that their minds have anything in common,—in fact, nothing is said about their minds. It is this physical passion that is finally rewarded at the sacrifice of all the ideals of loyalty and generosity and duty. And this reward is represented as just and right. Now there is no use in ignoring the physical part of us. We share with the brutes certain desires and instincts and habits that are a very necessary part of life. But we are distinguished from the brutes by our possession of minds and souls that can control the physical and hold it in check and can look for something in life beyond and above the mere satisfaction of brute appetites. Else why sell your loaf of bread and buy a narcissus? Why the philosophy and the poetry that feed the soul? The book that stresses the physical to the virtual exclusion of the spiritual in man and that represents it as the most important part of us and the part to be considered in the final solution of the central problem, is, to my mind, an immoral book. We know that when man and woman are drawn to each other, although passion plays a large part in the attraction, and although there are some people who seem to be all physical, there are in most cases other and spiritual

bonds as well. A book like that described above, and all naturalistic fiction, tells only a part of the story, as was said in the last chapter; we find in it only a part of truth, even though it may picture realistically "a slice of life." W. L. George, accusing the English novel of insincerity, says, "Our literary characters are lopsided because their ordinary traits are fully portrayed, analysed with extraordinary minuteness, while their sex life is cloaked, minimised, or left out."⁸ Perhaps this is true if the purpose of the novelist be, after the manner of the modern realist, to present a minute analysis of all the thoughts and actions of the character. But a book that—not cloaks, perhaps—but minimizes and leaves out the spiritual side of man is just as insincere, and moreover it is choosing for presentation the lower side of man's nature, not the higher. It is the calling of the artist to enlarge the nature of his public for good and not for bad, in the direction of the higher things not the lower. This is not to say, in the cant of the modern puritan, that the author should be a Great Teacher—although he usually is. He teaches by virtue of the fact that he is a man and so raised, himself, above the brutes, and that he is a man with greater vision and insight into reality than other men and a surer grasp of the spiritual significance of human life. And by recording and interpreting these visions and this grasp, he helps us to grow spiritually. Necessary to this growth is a knowledge and a use of the physical. It may be old-fashioned to quote *Rabbi Ben Ezra*. But Browning found the right relationship between body and spirit.

Let us not always say,
"Spite of this flesh to-day
I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!"
As the bird wings and sings,

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 129.

Let us cry, "All good things
Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than
flesh helps soul!"

And the direction of flight and song is indicated in those earlier, familiar stanzas:

Poor vaunt of life indeed,
Were man but formed to feed
On joy, to solely seek and find and feast;
Such feasting ended, then
As sure an end to men;
Irks care the crop-full bird? Frets doubt the
maw-crammed beast?

Rejoice we are allied
To that which doth provide
And not partake, effect and not receive!
A spark disturbs our clod;
Nearer we hold of God
Who gives, than of his tribes that take,
I must believe.

Thus we come to the final question. Does all great literature have ethical value, and should it? Mr. Spingarn, in the passage quoted earlier in this chapter, tries to prove that poetry is neither moral nor immoral. He draws an analogy between art and cookery or bridge-building, and claims that as we do not demand ethics of a cauliflower, we should not ask it of a poem. The analogies here, however, will not hold. The perfectly cooked cauliflower is the product of the physical skill of the cook, his ability to put together the given ingredients in exactly the right proportions and at exactly the right time. The great poem is far more than this. It is the result of putting together the ingredients of *experience* in exactly the right proportions and at exactly the right time, and it is also the interpretation of that experience. Art is the expression of personal experience, which the pastry of the cook and the bridge of the engineer are not; the artist

who can keep his moral attitudes out of his art is superior perhaps infra-human. Moreover, books do not merely nourish the body and tickle the material palate or make easy the physical progress of man from place to place, like pastry and bridges. Their service is to the immaterial, even the spiritual part of human nature. If art were merely external, merely a matter of form, if it appealed merely to the physical senses, it might be regarded as free of ethical significance. Those artists who have so regarded it have come nearest to Mr. Spingarn's idea of unmoral beauty. But most of us agree that the content of literature is important as well as the form, and that content can scarcely be at the same time of value and lacking in moral significance one way or another. How many of those whose art is wholly a matter of externals are to be ranked or ever have been ranked, save by a few enthusiasts, among the greatest artists? Beauty of form has its value, but that value is greatly enhanced by moral content; the man is of more worth than the faun. And can we even say that beauty of form is strictly unmoral? Beauty is its own excuse for being, but why? Morality is said to be concerned with "the richest possible content of value that can be realized in human life."⁹ If beauty consist in what we have said, that balance and harmony which gives us a sense of balance and harmony, is it not directed toward that realization? Is it not making life richer, fuller, more ordered and harmonized for its beholders? Has it not, then, a definite moral function?

An appeal to the facts shows that all supreme literature has a definite and positive ethical value. As we have seen, it is not necessarily or even preferably didactic. We may well be reluctant to have it always demanded that litera-

⁹ Everett, Walter Goodnow, *Moral Values* (Holt, 1918), p. 380.

ture shall "do good." But reflection will probably make us realize that the refreshment, recreation, and enlargement which come from books are positive goods. The connotation of the phrase "do good" is unfortunate. We must divest it of the sanctimonious. Then we shall be ready to acknowledge that literature has a spiritual significance which makes it a positive influence for good, for the realization of that "richest possible content of value." Our spirits cannot but be richer, our judgments surer after reading Sophocles or Goethe or Shakespeare. The poetry of Swinburne, glorious as it is in form, is not of the greatest, because it expresses a negative philosophy, the very opposite of the vigorous spiritual inspiration of Browning's more rugged verse. The powerfully depressing work of the extreme realists falls below the highest rank partly, at least, because of that very depressing power. There are also, of course, many books of mere entertainment. They may be good books of their kind, useful books, for anything that contributes to mental rest and recreation is useful. But they are not masterpieces; their place will be taken by the next book of their kind. They have no individual message of spiritual power which will bring us back to them again and again for real refreshment; their powers of entertainment are exhausted at the single reading. Yet, just as our slightest intelligent voluntary acts may be said to have some moral significance, so the lightest of verse or the slightest of novels may have some influence for good or bad. Creative writing, emanating from and dealing with man's experience, must have some reference to his conduct. And, since we are men and not animals, since we are moral beings with something in our normal make-up that corresponds to the old-fashioned conscience, there is to be found and should be found in all great literature a positive influence that will bring us

higher life values both as individuals and as members of the social order.

It is significant also that the greatest critics through the ages have required of literature a positive ethical value. Aristotle, Longinus, Dante, Sidney, Dryden, Shelley, Arnold, Pater, Shaw, and Sherman, many of whom, it will be noticed, are both critics and creative writers, in varying manners and to varying degrees make this demand. "Art is the conscience of mankind," said Hebbel in his Diaries.¹⁰ "Poetry was the first philosophy that ever was known," wrote Sir Thomas Elyot, "whereby men from their childhood were brought to the reason how to live well." "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world," runs the last sentence of Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*. And Pater, in his essay on *Style*, summed up as follows his conception of the nature of greatness in literary art:

It is on the quality of the matter it informs or controls, its compass, its variety, its alliance to great ends, or the depth of the note of revolt, or the largeness of hope in it, that the greatness of literary art depends, as *The Divine Comedy*, *Paradise Lost*, *Les Misérables*, *The English Bible*, are great art. Given the conditions I have tried to explain as constituting good art;—then, if it be devoted further to the increase of men's happiness, to the redemption of the oppressed, or the enlargement of our sympathies with each other, or to such presentment of new or old truth about ourselves and our relation to the world as may ennoble and fortify us in our sojourn here, or immediately, as with Dante, to the glory of God, it will be also great art; if, over and above those qualities I summed up as mind and soul—that colour and mystic perfume, and that reasonable structure, it has something of the soul of humanity in it, and finds its logical, its architectural place, in the great structure of human life.

Here is the point that has already been insisted upon, that the relation of literature to human life gives it in-

¹⁰ II. 2486.

evitably a moral significance, and that if it is great, that significance will be of positive ethical value. Even those critics who argue that beauty itself or the subject-matter of art *per se* is neither moral nor immoral, cannot escape the admission that it has a significance for character and conduct. Mr. Spingarn says, at the close of the passage which we have already examined, "If the ideals enunciated by poets are not those which we admire most, we must blame not the poets but ourselves: in the world where morals count we have failed to give them the proper material out of which to rear a nobler edifice."

Perhaps Longinus, in his analysis of the function of literature, has discovered the foundation of the necessity of ethical value. For him, the canon of the true Sublime was that it should transport everyone. And how can literature transport (unless to lower levels, which is surely not his meaning nor yet the desire of any lover of art), except it have spiritual value?

To Longinus also we turn for suggestions concerning another aspect of the subject of ethical power, its relationship to the other values of literature. The Greek saw that ethical value alone cannot make a book great, that it cannot stand without leaning upon the strength of intellectual and emotional appeal and imaginative expression. For he lists, as the ways of attaining sublimity, command of strong and manly thought, intense passion, skill in figures, nobility of phrase, dignified and elevated *ordonnance*. Thought, emotions, and expression must all be sublime in order that the masterpiece may transport the spirit of its reader. Only thus does the poet justify the claim,

Yet we are the movers and shakers
Of the world for ever, it seems.¹¹

¹¹ O'Shaughnessy, Arthur, *Ode: We Are the Music-makers*.

CHAPTER V

EMOTIONAL VALUE

WITHOUT doubt, the most important and most significant content value that literature can have is the emotional. An appeal to the emotions is the distinguishing mark of every piece of writing that lays any claim to the name of literature. The lack of it puts outside the pale many a scientific treatise which has high intellectual value and many a religious tract of ethical significance. The astronomer may be powerfully moved by awe and wonder in his researches into the mystery of the heavens; but rarely does a book on astronomy record his feelings; it usually records merely his calculations and his discoveries. If it does express those emotions and stir the reader to corresponding feelings, then the book becomes literature. And the dullest of novels, the flattest of dramatic failures, the worst of poems at least endeavor to express and to arouse emotion.

The word *emotion* carries in its etymology the idea of moving. When we are stirred and moved by a person or thing, we experience an emotion, which is described in one text book on psychology as "any complex fact of consciousness of which either pleasantness or unpleasantness is the significant feature,"¹ and in another as "an hereditary 'pattern-reaction' involving profound changes of the bodily mechanism as a whole, but particularly of

¹ Calkins, M. W., *An Introduction to Psychology* (Macmillan, 1916), p. 263.

the visceral and glandular systems.”² The emotion may be an entirely egoistic experience; the pleasantness or unpleasantness may be referred completely to our own experience, without any regard, for instance, to the feelings of the person who inspires the emotion in us. Or it may be a sympathetic experience, one in which we feel happy or unhappy in sharing the happiness or unhappiness of others. In any case, emotion is an intensely personal experience, one which stirs our own selves, whether it be our consciousness or our bodily mechanism, in relation to or response to a particular person or object or situation.

For the purposes of literary criticism, the term emotion may be made largely inclusive. Under the shadow of the two main classes, pleasant and unpleasant emotions, will walk many experiences that we commonly call moods or feelings or attitudes,—peacefulness, and surprise, and hostility, for instance. Such experiences are not emotions, although they are closely related to them.³ As they all include the process of moving or stirring the experiencer, however, we may treat them on the same basis.

In considering the emotional appeal of books, we must remember that there are three people whose emotional experience must be examined, the writer, the character, and the reader. Some writers on literary criticism, including Winchester, think that the emotion of the reader is the only one of real importance. It is perhaps of first importance, for it is the emotional response of the reader that determines the degree of success which the writer has had in conveying his experience, and the emotional value

² Watson, John B., *Psychology from the Standpoint of a Behaviorist*, second edition (Lippincott [1924]), p. 215.

³ See Titchener, E. B., *An Outline of Psychology*, second edition (Macmillan, 1897), Chapter IX, and Watson, *op. cit.*, Chapter VI, especially pp. 238-240.

of book or poem is, in the last analysis, measured by the value of the emotions aroused in the reader, rather than of those felt by the writer or those portrayed in the character. But at the same time it is obvious that the emotion of writer or character is significant because it moves the reader. If it does not, then any emotions that he may feel when reading the book will be due to causes entirely apart from the content of the volume. He may have an emotional response before he reads it,—a response due to the associations or suggestions of subject or title. He may be affected by the binding, paper, and typography, the comfort of the chair, the adequacy and position of the light, his health, his state of mind. But these, although they may affect his emotional receptivity toward the book itself, are clearly not literary causes. His real emotional response will be to the results, as shown in the content of the book, of the writer's own emotions, and to the portrayal of emotions in the characters of novel or drama or poem.

The main sources of emotional effect may be grouped under three headings: appeal to the senses, the evocation of associations, and the direct statement or suggestion of emotion. Sometimes the three modes will be found so closely associated that one can hardly be considered independently of the other. The following poem by Andrew Lang is an interesting one to study in an effort to determine how he secures his emotional effect.

SCYTHE SONG⁴

Mowers, weary and brown and blithe,
What is the word methinks ye know—
Endless over-word that the scythe
Sings to the blades of grass below?

⁴From *Poetical Works* (Longmans, Green & Co., 1923). Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

Scythes that swing in grass and clover,
Something, still, they say as they pass;
What is the word that, over and over,
Sings the scythe to the flowers and grass?

*Hush, oh hush, the scythes are saying,
Hush, and heed not, and fall asleep,
Hush, they say to the grasses swaying,
Hush, they sing to the clover deep!
Hush—'tis the lullaby Time is singing—
Hush, and heed not, for all things pass,
Hush, oh hush! and the scythes are swinging
Over the clover, over the grass.*

The emotion of the poet here, the feeling that he is trying to express and convey to the reader, is one of sadness and of resignation to pain, coupled with a mood of deep peacefulness. He transmits this feeling and this mood partly by means of suggestion and direct statement. The peacefulness is suggested, for instance, by the words *hush* and *fall asleep* and *lullaby*. "Hush, and heed not, and fall asleep," he says, and again, "Hush, and heed not, for all things pass." The message of resignation from the scythes to the grasses is the message of the poet to his reader. There is no word of suffering or pain in the entire poem; the sadness is suggested by the feeling that some such message of comfort is desperately needed by the grasses, and, by implication, by men. Only at the close of the poem does he definitely make the application to human life, and even there his method is suggestive rather than direct. The pathetic fallacy, although, as Ruskin says, it is seldom employed by the greatest poets, is, as here, capable of certain impressive emotional effects.

The associations evoked by the poem also serve to produce the desired emotions. The dread image of Time or of Death armed with a scythe and mowing down the ranks of human life is the direct consequence of the

imagery of the entire poem reinforced by the specific reference to Time in the last stanza. Hence comes the feeling of sadness. But any touch of terror or dread is softened if not dispelled by the happier associations with the picture that is the visual basis of the whole poem. There may be an actual hayfield in which we have seen the scythes swinging, the peaceful atmosphere of which is still clear in our memories. There may be a description in some book, such as that in *Anna Karenina*, with its graphic presentation of the feeling of peace and well-being that came to Levin after his arduous labor. There may be the image of some picture, such as Millet's "The Gleaners" or even "The Angelus," with its suggestion of peace and rest after toil. Each one of these memories and associations carries with it its own emotions, which in turn strengthen the emotional effect of the poem. The writer knows that he can count on a varied experience in his readers, that somewhere in that experience he can probably find a point of contact with the expression of his emotion. He is wise if he chooses to express his emotion through images that will touch man's experience at many points.

In the third place, the poem produces its emotional effect,—especially does it create the mood of peacefulness,—by means of an appeal to the senses. It does this, first, by drawing a picture of a peaceful scene, and presenting to the "inward eye" images of calm and beauty. The mowers, weary and happy, who drop out of the poem entirely after the first two lines, serve the purpose of creating a picture at the very first moment. Even if we have never beheld such a scene, in life or in art, we have it immediately presented to us in words. The details in the picture are the details of beauty, "grasses swaying" and "clover deep"; every direct appeal to sight or any of the

other senses is one of peaceful loveliness. The kinæsthetic imagery aids the effect. We feel the soothing rhythm of the scythe not merely in the descriptive words but in the very movement of the lines themselves and in the frequent repetition of sound and word and phrase:

*Hush—'tis the lullaby Time is singing—
Hush, and heed not, for all things pass,
Hush, oh hush! and the scythes are swinging
Over the clover, over the grass.*

The ear, too, is quieted. The soft sounds throughout the poem, and the oft-repeated "hush" re-create the peaceful sound of the scythe. The song that we hear is a lullaby. And the s's are not merely onomatopoeitic; they are in themselves soothing, as are the long vowels which appear in almost every stressed syllable.

Similarly we might study other poems or books to see how the emotional effect is produced. A very different poem, for instance, dramatic rather than lyric, picturing emotion before it conveys it, is Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's *Saturn*:⁵

From my farm, from hér farm
Furtively we came. . . .
In either home a hearth was warm:
We nursed a hungrier flame.

Our feet were foul with mire,
Our faces blind with mist;
But all the night was naked fire
About us where we kissed.

To hér farm, to my farm,
Loathing we returned;
Pale beneath a gallows arm
The planet Saturn burned.

⁵ From *The Vigil of Venus and Other Poems* (London, Methuen & Co., Ltd., [1912]), pp. 74-75.

Here, in sharp contrast to the rhythm of Lang's poem, the short, rapid, staccato movement of the lines suggests the furtive haste, the guilty eagerness of the two lovers. The visual and tactual images are dark and passionate: the blinding mist, the foul mire, the gallows, and the baleful planet which is both pale and burning. Although there may be other scenes, in literature or in life, called up to the memory of the reader by this poem, the poet does not depend greatly upon association for his emotional effect. He is interested in presenting dramatically a situation and two people; hence he uses the more direct mode of creation of the scene by means of images and immediate presentation of the emotions of the lovers. Each stanza contains, not merely descriptive details, but clear expression of passion. Consequently there are stirred in the reader horror, passion, and strong sympathy, all of which the poet himself must feel. Thus the poem arouses in us feelings akin to those of the writer, emotions sympathetic with those of the actors, and a resultant emotional state compounded of these and of attitudes and moods that are more personal to ourselves.

We have examined carefully only poetry, but the same method of study may be used in connection with other forms of literature. The possibilities of dialogue in both fiction and drama for the direct presentation of emotion, the opportunities of the novelist for analysis of the feelings of his characters, and his chance for the use of description to intensify and set off those feelings are all very great. Hardy's use of scene is an excellent illustration of this last point. It is an interesting problem to take books of various kinds that deal with the same subject and see how they produce the various degrees of emotional effect. The French Revolution is considered by

Shailer Mathews from the point of view of the historian. An excellent history, full of accurate and interesting information, his book has little emotional appeal except as the events themselves stir the emotions. But when Carlyle writes of the same events, he informs them with high emotional power by means of all the devices of suggestion, association, and sense appeal which belong to his vivid prose. Blake, in his poem, *The French Revolution*, adds even more powerful suggestions to the picture. And Dickens combines the description of scene and background with the representation of the feelings of his characters to produce the emotional appeal of great fiction. Of the execution of Louis XVI, Professor Mathews writes:

He was taken from his cell and carried to the guillotine. He attempted to address the crowd on the scaffold, but his voice was drowned in the roar of drums, and a second later Louis added another to the short list of monarchs who have died like criminals.*

Carlyle's account is full of picturesque and moving detail:

His hands are tied, his head bare; the fatal moment is come. He advances to the edge of the Scaffold, 'his face very red,' and says: 'Frenchmen, I die innocent: it is from the Scaffold and near approaching before God that I tell you so. I pardon my enemies; I desire that France—' A General on horseback, Santerre or another, prances out, with uplifted hand: 'Tambours!' The drums drown the voice. 'Executioners, do your duty!' The Executioners . . . seize the hapless Louis: six of them desperate, him singly desperate, struggling there; and bind him to their plank. Abbé Edgeworth, stooping, bespeaks him: 'Son of Saint Louis, ascend to Heaven.' The Axe clanks down; a King's Life is shorn away.†

* *The French Revolution*, third edition (Longmans, Green and Co., 1901), p. 219.

† *The French Revolution*, Part III, Book II, Chapter 8.

No one can forget this scene. Nor can anyone forget the execution of Sidney Carton, as the knitting-women count to Twenty-Three. Blake gives us no description of the guillotine; but he had a vision of blood, symbolized by the Duke of Burgundy:

Then the ancientest Peer, Duke of Burgundy, rose from the
Monarch's right hand, red as wines
From his mountains; an odour of war, like a ripe vineyard,
rose from his garments,
And the chamber became as a clouded sky; o'er the Council
he stretch'd his red limbs
Cloth'd in flames of crimson; as a ripe vineyard stretches
over sheaves of corn,
The fierce Duke hung over the Council; around him crowd,
weeping in his burning robe,
A bright cloud of infant souls: his words fall like purple
autumn on the sheaves.*

Neither of the poems that are quoted and discussed above is a very happy one. Nor are the accounts of the French Revolution joyous. The emotions aroused are those of sadness or of horror. This does not mean, of course, that all literature should or does stir such feelings. It merely reminds us that the painful and unpleasant may be so represented in art that pleasure, not pain, is the resulting emotion of the reader. Otherwise tragedy would repel rather than attract, or else would inspire only a morbid interest. But we know that this is not true. What does the artist do with the material of tragedy or pathos? He finds it in life and must use it. But in life he often finds it united with such material as makes him turn to it with healthy, not morbid, concern. And in art there is always combined with the painful or the horrible or the disgusting something which gives the reader pleas-

* *The French Revolution*, ll. 83-88.

ure. The pleasurable element may be closely associated with the painful stimulus itself, or it may be in the effect which the painful stimulus has upon the reader. The figure of a weak man, for instance, may be pitiful as well as contemptible; an act of unmitigated cruelty or injustice, although it will give painful emotions to the reader, will stir at the same time a moral indignation which in itself will be pleasurable. The war poems of men like Siegfried Sassoon and Gilbert Frankau would be almost unbearable because of the horrors they depict in detail were it not for their suggestions of heroism and sacrifice and for the hope which they carry and in which they were written of the eventual abolition of war. Were there nothing but the loathsome or the contemptible in Dickens' pictures, we should turn away in disgust from Uriah Heep, and should not bestow a second glance upon Jenny Wren's "bad boy." Something more than morbid interest is ours as we follow their fortunes. The emotion that we feel is so treated, so placed in conjunction with other emotions as to be artistically sound. The "bad boy" is not merely a contemptible figure; he is pitiable. And we find pleasure too in our keen sympathy for the little dolls' dressmaker. Here are emotions, growing out of and involved with our contempt, which satisfy, enlarge, and ennoble. So, in larger scenes of horror or tragedy or pathos, our pleasure in the nobility of character that withstands pain and evil, our sympathy with suffering lift us out of the realm of the merely unpleasant or painful.

Thus almost any emotion may legitimately be represented in art, almost any object, no matter how painful, how disgusting, if the imagination of the writer finds in it meanings or associations that are pleasurable, or arouses by it in the reader healthy and pleasurable feelings. A battered and over-full garbage can, for instance,

may conceivably be a fit subject for art, if the artist sees in it a symbol of such phases of human living as will inspire divine pity. Almost any feeling may be evoked in the reader which is not a selfish feeling. Jealousy, perhaps, although it may be represented, should never be aroused. But disgust, if it is for the disgusting, hatred, if it is for the hateful, horror, if it is for the horrible,—all these and many others the artist may inspire in his readers. Sorrow may even in itself be pleasant, if the sorrow is mild. Yet when we find pleasure in sadness, we may usually discover, if we search, other causes for pleasure. We may even realize, if we are honest, that our enjoyment arises out of self-pity, and then we shall draw back from sentimentality.

In great literature the artist not only evokes pleasurable emotions in connection with the very object represented, but also weaves between us and the scene of pain or horror a veil of beauty that itself gives pleasure. The flogging of Quasimodo is made bearable partly by the quality of Victor Hugo's prose; on the screen of the moving pictures the scene is intolerable. The most painful and disgusting situations and objects are often presented by the great realists with such beauty or effectiveness of phrase that they give pleasure. The mere mechanics of beautiful writing have their effect upon the reader. Wordsworth, in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, speaks of the advantage which meter gives to verse over prose in this respect:

This opinion may be further illustrated by appealing to the Reader's own experience of the reluctance with which he comes to the reperusal of the distressful parts of *Clarissa Harlowe*, or the *Gamester*; while Shakespeare's writings, in the most pathetic scenes, never act upon us, as pathetic, beyond the bounds of pleasure. . . . Now the music of harmonious metrical language,

the sense of difficulty overcome, and the blind association of pleasure which has been previously received from works of rhyme or metre . . . imperceptibly make up a complex feeling of delight which is of the most important use in tempering the painful feeling always found intermingled with powerful descriptions of the deeper passions.

The illustration of Quasimodo also points to another reason why we are not moved by such a scene in literature beyond the limits of toleration. There is always in the mind, although, it may be, in the background, the realization that this is an imitation of life, not life itself. There is always the veil not only of beauty but of art between us and the painful object. The horror which would overwhelm us if we were witnessing a scene from real life, is lessened by the realization that we are reading of events that are fictitious or are at least over and done with. And as a moving picture seems, for the moment, at least, more real than a description, we find the flogging of Quasimodo for this reason also less tolerable on the screen. The Greeks, in their tragedies, never represented a scene of death or of horror directly on the stage. They preferred to soften the pain and heighten the æsthetic effect by having such an incident described in beautiful language. The reserve which we find in Greek literature is creative of beauty and sublimity. On the other hand, the recognition that a scene, although accepted as art, is true to life, is a source of pleasure in itself. Here is one of the causes of the artistic power of even extreme realism. The joy that comes from meeting with truth in literature has already been considered in an earlier chapter. The characters who are mere automata or conventional types will neither move us by their fictitious joys and sorrows nor will they give us pleasure. But with the greatest sympathetic grief that comes from the tragedy

of a truly lifelike character, there is always mingled a pleasing recognition that here is human life; and the tragedy in turn is made more poignant because this pleasing recognition intensifies the pain.

Mr. Santayana, speaking from the point of view of æsthetics, has much to say about the tragic and the painful in art. In life, he declares, "the saddest scenes may lose their bitterness in their beauty."⁹ And in art,

All subjects, even the most repellent, when the circumstances of life thrust them before us, can thus be observed with curiosity and treated with art. . . . Art does not seek out the pathetic, the tragic, and the absurd; it is life that has imposed them upon our attention, and enlisted art in their service, to make the contemplation of them, since it is inevitable, at least as tolerable as possible.

The agreeableness of the presentation is thus mixed with the horror of the thing; and the result is that while we are saddened by the truth we are delighted by the vehicle that conveys it to us. The mixture of these emotions constitutes the peculiar flavour and poignancy of pathos. . . . [T]he truth is that only by the addition of positive beauties can these evil experiences be made agreeable to contemplation.

. . . We are not pleased by virtue of the suggested evils, but in spite of them; and if ever the charm of the beautiful presentation sinks so low, or the vividness of the represented evil rises so high, that the balance is in favour of pain, at that very moment the whole object becomes horrible, passes out of the domain of art, and can be justified only by its scientific or moral uses.¹⁰

"Remove from any drama," he says in illustration, "—say from *Othello*—the charm of the medium of presentation; reduce the tragedy to a mere account of the facts and of the words spoken, such as our newspapers almost daily contain; and the tragic dignity and beauty is entirely lost."¹¹

We come to the conclusion, then, that pain and evil

⁹ *The Sense of Beauty*, pp. 220-221.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 221-222.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

and ugliness have a distinct place in literature. But the emotional effect that is produced is the result not merely of the original emotion that is expressed or portrayed, but also of the art of the expression or portrayal. If the art pleases, the evil or pain will be lifted into beauty and become an "æsthetic good." That art will be recognized partly in the power of the writer to arouse in the reader other emotions that shall be pleasing and ennobling in conjunction with those that are painful; the true artist will not sing hymns merely of hate. He will give us pleasure by the very form of his expression and by the double realization that we are in the presence of something that is both not life but art and at the same time true to life.

Emotion, as it finds its place in literature, whether pleasing or painful, should be based on valid grounds. Many books that have a strong emotional appeal are rightly accused of sentimentality. Sentimentality may be defined as false or artificial sentiment; that writing, therefore, is sentimental whose emotional effects result from insufficient causes. Chaucer's Prioress is sentimental:

She wolde wepe, if that she sawe a mous
Caught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde.

Barrie's Tommy, whose emotions were on the surface, ready to be stirred by the first stimulus, is rightly named. Sentimentality, inasmuch as it exists in life, may be effectively represented in fiction or drama. But it is a serious fault in a writer, nor should the reader ever be moved to spurious emotion. Sometimes sentimentality appears to be beneficial to a generation. Pollyanna may have drawn many into "the glad game." But reason reminds us that much of this gladness has too slight a foundation, and that it will fall at the first touch of sin-

cere, valid emotion. We protest at the following lines from Cowper's *Task*, representing the extravagance of the humanitarian feeling in England in his day:

I would not enter on my list of friends,
Though graced with polished manners and fine sense,
Yet wanting sensibility, the man
Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm.

The grounds for the emotion and for the resultant action here are insufficient; the needless killing of a worm is not, to the sober eye of reason nor yet to the understanding heart of true emotion, adequate cause for the breaking off of a friendship. Sentimentality frequently has a wrong scale of values. Even great writers are sometimes guilty of sentimentality: Dickens forces tears over Little Nell, Burns over a wounded hare.

A true artist does not try to make an emotional mountain out of a molehill. He does not force an emotional effect by unnatural and artificial means. In a comparatively recent novel, one of the characters, a young and beautiful woman, goes mad and tries to commit murder. Here is enough cause for horror. But the author must needs clothe her in a red dress and turn her loose, flashing dagger in hand, in the midst of a terrific thunderstorm, to range through a house in which all the electric lights have been put out by the storm. The terror which the reader might feel at her appearance—in a doorway, of course, lighted by a brilliant flash of lightning—is ousted by scornful amusement because of all these adventitious aids in the form of cheap theatrical devices.

Validity of emotional effect will result in sincerity of feeling. Great literature will always arouse in the reader sincere emotions. But how many who play "the glad game" are really, sincerely glad? They may think they are, but they will find that the emotion is so superficial

that it can easily be brushed away by a touch of truth. A show of happiness may be brave, and, if the James-Lange theory of emotions be true, it may succeed in inducing happiness itself. But for the man who "laughs that he may not weep," sorrow, not joy, is the sincere feeling. Humor that springs from bitterness is often peculiarly poignant; it is the power of the bitterness that makes it so. Underneath are permanent and real emotions. Feeling that is forced by sentimental and theatrical devices may be intense, but it will not be sincere. The girl who thrills to the scene of the red-clad madwoman is experiencing an artificial emotion. In Percival Wren's *Beau Sabreur*, a novel of adventure which followed upon a deluge of "idle and extravagant stories" about desert sheikhs, the emotional response of Maudie was intense enough: her wildest dreams, nourished by sentimental fiction, had come true: she was courted by a Sheikh. "And how long," asked Maudie's mistress, "did you plan to deceive her and play this Sheikh game with her?" "Just up to the day when she realizes," responded the pseudo Son of the Desert, "that she's fair fed full with Arabs and Desert Sheikhs, and begins to wish I was an ornery white man,"¹²—that is, until her real emotions manifested themselves. The reader wonders how long this will be. Reading much of the kind of fiction on which Maudie had fed, results in the formation of a habit of sentimentality, a habit of superficial and invalid feeling, and in the stultifying of the real emotions.

It is not incumbent, however, upon the other two members of the emotional triumvirate, the character and the author, always to be sincere in their emotions. Obviously the character represented may be either consciously or unconsciously insincere. Tartuffes and Uriah Heeps,

¹² Wren, P. C., *Beau Sabreur* (Stokes, 1926), p. 311.

as well as Sentimental Tommies and Maudies, have their place in fiction and drama. It follows that the author must often voice sentiments in the words of his characters that are not his own. This we recognize, usually, when we view the novel or play as a whole, and appreciate the dramatic purpose of the writer. But it sometimes happens that one expression of feeling is detached from a larger work, and we forget the context. For instance, the familiar song from *Pippa Passes* has often been attacked as sentimental and insincere. So it might be if Browning were saying it; but it is the most natural and honest thing in the world for Pippa to sing,

The year's at the spring
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hill-side's dew-pearled;
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn:
God's in his heaven—
All's right with the world!

Experience may have made us feel that such a conclusion is based upon invalid grounds, but not so Pippa!

Subjective poetry, on the other hand, is expected to express the sincere emotions of the writer. Great lyrics are the result of honest, even if temporary, feeling. Each of Burns' songs of love comes from his heart. Yet some charming lyrics have been written from surface emotions. Many of the Elizabethan sonnet cycles grew, not out of passion, but out of the literary convention, and were addressed to a purely imaginary mistress. Such lyrics, though delightful, are not among the greatest; and they do not move the reader to sincere and profound emotion. Such a poem as *Childe Harold*, too, is so highly subjective that we expect the emotions of Harold to be those of his creator. Sometimes, however, the expression

of emotion sounds hollow, and we dislike it in proportion to our feeling that Byron and his hero are the same. We have a strong suspicion that he is talking for effect, a suspicion that is confirmed by a knowledge of Byron's life. We remember that the strongest emotion finds expression in the simplest and briefest form. There is true grief in David's cry, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" There is true repentance in the words of the Prodigal Son, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight: I am no more worthy to be called thy son." Is there such in these lines?

Alas! our young affections run to waste,
Or water but the desert; whence arise
But weeds of dark luxuriance, tares of haste,
Rank at the core, though tempting to the eyes,
Flowers whose wild odours breathe but agonies,
And trees whose gums are poison;—such the plants
Which spring beneath her steps as Passion flies
O'er the world's wilderness, and vainly pants
For some celestial fruit forbidden to our wants.

Methinks he doth protest too much. The same poet's *Don Juan* is an interesting and sometimes puzzling study in emotional sincerity. His sudden drops from the sublime to the ridiculous, from pathos to bathos, make the reader question the genuineness of the pathetic or sublime. Again, as in the case of *Pippa Passes*, we must consider the context before we judge. These sudden shifts are part of Byron's purpose, to startle the reader into that very questioning, and part of his own sincere attitude of cynicism and doubt toward his own as well as others' seriousness.

Apparent sentimentality or insincerity, then, may be the result of perfectly sincere feeling adapted to the author's purpose, whether dramatic, as in the case of

Browning, or satiric, as in the case of Byron. The great writer is sincere in his presentation of emotion, either his own or that of his characters. The test of his sincerity is usually the emotional response of the reader; if that is sincere and strong and valid, if we are moved without reasoning about it, and if reasoning does not lessen the moving power of the book, above all, if we can come back again and again to the book and experience the same emotion undiminished, nay, even strengthened by each re-reading, then surely the writer himself has been sincere. Usually he feels strongly with his characters; usually too he is in sympathy with his readers. We, like Byron, question the reality of our feelings and become somewhat sceptical of our own moments of seriousness, when Byron does, and wants us to. Like Thackeray, we weep over the death of Colonel Newcome.

The validity and sincerity of emotion are important in determining the power of it. If the emotion portrayed or expressed is itself strong, valid, and sincere, the response on the part of the reader should be commensurate with it. Strength or power does not necessarily mean turbulence, however; the emotional response to some of Wordsworth's poetry, *Tintern Abbey* or the sonnet beginning

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,

for example, may be even stronger than that induced by Byron's finest and most stirring passages, although it will be quieter. As has been suggested before, these strong emotions, being often silent, or at least reserved, themselves, find their most adequate expression in few words. These words may be very simple, but they will, of course, be chosen as the result of the author's imagination. This point will be considered more fully in a

later chapter. Here it is sufficient to point out how the reader's emotion, strong because of the strength of the original emotion and because of its validity and sincerity, will be strengthened still more by highly imaginative expression. In Wordsworth's *Michael*, for instance, the account of Luke's downward course enhances, by reason of its very brevity and baldness, the sympathetic grief of the reader, and the account of the sorrow of the old father is equally reserved and simple. As Professor J. L. Lowes has said,¹³ the emotional intensity of the whole poem is gathered up in the single climactic line,

And never lifted up a single stone.

There is room in literature, however, for emotions that are not so powerful. Although it is true that the greatest literature does stir us strongly, whether pleasantly or unpleasantly, there are many books that move us to quiet and moderate enjoyment. Jane Austen, for example, rarely depicts or arouses strong feeling. Yet those who know her know also the emotional health as well as the intellectual stimulus that comes from reading *Pride and Prejudice* or *Persuasion*. It is like sitting down with a wise and humorous friend to talk of people and of life.

A limitation of Jane Austen, one lack which keeps her from the highest rank of novelists, is the want of range and variety in emotions. But she and other writers, similarly limited,—Milton, Wordsworth, Arnold Bennett, Trollope, Sara Teasdale—have yet written well and nobly. There are not many who have the "comprehensive soul" of Shakespeare and Chaucer. The dramatist and the novelist need it particularly, those who present

¹³ *Convention and Revolt in Poetry* (Houghton Mifflin Co. [c 1919]), p. 188.

the variety of human life. The dramatic power of sympathizing with a large number of different persons is often found in poets as well as in writers of plays and novels. Chaucer has been mentioned; each of the *Canterbury Tales* corroborates the impression of the remarkable range of his sympathies already produced by the Prologue. Browning, the poet of "men and women," controls an amazing variety of emotions. *The Ring and the Book*, for instance, not to mention the numerous briefer dramatic monologues, is evidence of his mastery of a multiplicity of feelings. And in a single drama or novel or narrative poem we have a right to expect great range of emotion, and we usually find it in supreme literature. In Shakespeare's plays there is not only "God's plenty" in the characters, but there is that amazing alternation of serious and light, tragic and comic. The change brings with it, of course, emotional relief. Yet at the same time there is unity of effect, for in almost every case the comic heightens the effect of the tragic, and throughout the play all the variety of emotional appeal is made to converge upon the central emotion, that feeling which gives it its tone or atmosphere. In a sense, the play or the novel is concerned, just as truly as the lyric poem, with the expression of one emotion; yet it is clear that in order to express that one emotion the author may in the course of his book run the whole gamut of feeling.

The long poem, novel, or play in which there is great range and variety of emotion need not consequently suffer any lapses in emotional power. Poe, it is true, said, "What we term a long poem is, in fact, merely a succession of brief ones—that is to say, of brief poetical effects." This statement from *The Philosophy of Composition* is based on his conception of a poem as the

cause of a single elevating excitement of the soul. "All excitements are," he wrote in *The Poetic Principle*, "through a psychal necessity, transient. That degree of excitement which would entitle a poem to be so called at all cannot be sustained throughout a composition of any great length. After the lapse of half an hour, at the very utmost, it flags—fails—a revulsion ensues—and then the poem is, in effect, and in fact, no longer such." But, as we have seen, the variety of emotional effects in a drama or a novel or a long poem gives an opportunity for emotional relaxation. The very division of a play into acts and scenes, of a novel into chapters, of a long poem into books or cantos, into stanzas or metrical paragraphs, is a recognition of the need for such relaxation. There is opportunity for rest, after which the excitement of the soul may be renewed, either by the same or by a different emotion. This does not mean, however, that there is any real lapse from the emotion. It is perfectly true that no emotion may be sustained at a high pitch indefinitely. But even with the pauses for rest, with the lessening of the strain, there should be nothing to invalidate the effect of the strain, no passage out of emotional harmony. In the *Scythe Song*, which was quoted and analyzed at the beginning of this chapter, the word *blithe* in the first line, with its suggestion of merriment and gayety, is out of tone with the rest of the picture and makes the reader feel that it was chosen not because it would help in the emotional effect of the poem but because it rhymed with *scythe*. Above all, in poetry there should be no lapses into prose. Byron is often guilty of this sin; in his case it is probably the result of hasty writing and failure to revise. Care might have altered the last line of the speech of the First Destiny, in *Manfred*,

Glory to Arimanes! on the earth
His power increaseth—both my sisters did
His bidding, nor did I neglect my duty!

Sometimes such a lapse is due to the too careful observance of a theory, as in the case of Wordsworth. In his desire to use the common speech of men, he too frequently writes passages that truly are not to be distinguished from prose, and uses words that lack any poetic suggestion. Such, for instance, is the word *prop* in *Simon Lee*:

One prop' he has, and only one,
His wife, an aged woman,
Lives with him, near the waterfall,
Upon the village Common.

An instance of a sudden drop from poetry into prose is to be found in these lines from *The Idiot Boy*:

The streams with softest sound are flowing,
The grass you almost hear it growing,
You hear it now, if e'er you can.

Even Milton may be guilty of the same fault; witness his famous anti-climax to the account of the angelic visit in the fifth book of *Paradise Lost*: "No fear lest dinner cool."

There are novels containing long passages of description or analysis or philosophizing, in which the emotions are allowed to flag disastrously. Or there are plays in which a scene is so long drawn out that the initial emotion disappears before the end. Sometimes comedy or tragedy is introduced incongruously into the midst of its opposite, and the result is a serious emotional revulsion. Such a danger led the ancients and the neo-classicists to bar tragi-comedy, as a mixture of conflicting emotions. Sometimes the conflict is not between different kinds of emotion, but between those of different levels. Dryden,

for instance, in his *All for Love*, introduced a scene between Cleopatra and Octavia, in which each forgets her royal dignity and descends to recriminations that are anything but queenly. The scene has been defended on the score of realism. Dryden himself, in his Preface to the play, said,

I judg'd it both natural and probable that Octavia, proud of her new gain'd conquest, would search out Cleopatra to triumph over her; and that Cleopatra, thus attack'd, was not of a spirit to shun the encounter; and 'tis not unlikely that two exasperated rivals should use such satire as I have put into their mouths; for after all, though the one were a Roman and the other a queen, they were both women.

As an individual scene, it may be realistic and natural enough. But the fact remains that throughout the remainder of the play both women are above "such satire," and the tone is higher and nobler and more ideal. Hence the scene, although it might be allowed merit for itself, mars the emotional effect of the play. Especially is this true in a drama as concentrated and unified as *All for Love*.

But in the greatest of novels, or plays, or poems, there is not an incident, not a phrase, not a word even, to jar upon the controlling emotion. There may be contrasts and variations, but all these will, in the hand of a true master, but contribute to the intensity of the feeling. It was Milton's lack of flexibility that led him into such an error as that cited above. His attempt at humor failed; it produced a contrast that was only grotesque. The comprehensiveness of a Shakespeare is what makes possible the sustaining of the central emotion of *King Lear* or *Hamlet*. A study of one of these plays will show how each detail contributes to the central emotion, even the words of the fool or the jests of the grave-diggers.

The madness of Lear, the death of Ophelia accomplish this purpose no better.

The statement that literature should appeal to the nobler emotions, or the higher emotions, has often been heard. What are the nobler or higher emotions? This question has already been partially answered in the preceding chapter. Those emotions, feelings, and attitudes which are ours because we are human beings and not animals, and which control our conduct as moral beings may be said to be higher, as we place men higher in the scale than beasts. Those which move us to right and happy living are noble. This conclusion would suggest that the emotions produced by an appeal to the senses, which we share with animals, should be low in the scale. Even the senses seem to be graded: sight and hearing, contributing less directly and less inevitably to creature comfort, stimulating more sharply the imagination, are considered loftier than touch, or than smell and taste, which bring us the grosser pleasures. Even of these last two, taste is considered the grosser and is less often used in literature. Any appeal to the senses which stops with the senses and takes no account of the spiritual faculties of man, may be regarded as of lower value than that which does recognize our distinctively human characteristics. But even such appeals have their legitimate place in literature; they may give us keen and lasting pleasure. The fact is, however, that the imagination of the true artist usually suggests something further, something higher than the mere sensual pleasure. Keats' stanza from *The Eve of St. Agnes* has often been cited in illustration:

And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep
In blanch'd linen, smooth, and lavender'd,
While he from forth the closet brought a heap

Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd;
With jellies soother than the creamy curd,
And lucent syrops, tinct with cinnamon;
Manna and dates, in argosy transferr'd
From Fez; and spiced dainties, every one,
From silken Samarcand to cedar'd Lebanon.

Here the imagination is stirred by the last three lines to realize the whole romance of the Orient. These dainties are no longer merely food for the body; they are nourishment for the fancy. Of similar effect, although less definite, is *Kubla Khan*, which calls up all our memories of Marco Polo, all our visions of Tartary.

The noble emotions, according to Ruskin, are "on the one side, Love, Veneration, Admiration, and Joy; and on the other, their opposites, Hate, Indignation, Horror, and Grief." But these must be defined a little more sharply. The feeling that the animal has for his master who feeds and pets and warms him is hardly a noble emotion. Nor is the hate that a man may feel for one who has injured him physically or financially. These emotions, to be really noble, must be the result of some inciting cause not merely physical and must have in them freedom from the selfishness, lack of the meanness which might bind them to the earth.

In other words, once more we realize the close connection between the various values of literature: those thoughts, we concluded, were most valuable which bore upon the problems of right and happy living; those emotions, we now see, are noblest and highest which we feel as moral beings. Hence the ultimate estimate of the rank of literature will depend upon all three of the content values, intellectual, ethical, and emotional. And it is obvious, as has been suggested before, that these content values would not be world values at all unless they were transmitted to the reader through the medium of

the imagination. Our next problem, therefore, is to see how the imagination may be made to interpret these values, to build them into artistic wholes, and to put them into such words that men and women everywhere and in every time may by reason of them more richly and fully live.

CHAPTER VI

IMAGINATIVE TREATMENT

UP to this point we have been considering the value of the experience of an author, and its potential corresponding value for the reader. It is not enough, however, that the writer should have an experience valuable to himself or even potentially valuable to others. To create literature he must have also the power of so handling that experience that it will be actually valuable to the reader. It is just here that the author's imagination is called upon.

What is imagination? ¹ A "shaping spirit," Coleridge called it, expressing that reorganization of material already in the mind which goes on in the imaginative process; Prescott says, "The imagination is, in a word, the eye of the mind." ² These two descriptions or definitions imply that through the imagination the writer has the power to see and the power to construct; he has a vision of his experience and he knows how to shape it in order to present it to his readers.

The imaginative artist works in three ways. By using his imagination the writer gathers together and makes a selection from the scattered elements of his experience, his ideas or his perceptions; these selected elements he may present nearly as he sees them or he may shape them into new combinations; in them he may find new meanings. Secondly, this material he will balance and harmonize, and out of it he will construct an artistic whole that shall by its very structure influence the imaginations of

¹ See pp. 40-41.

² Prescott, F. C., *The Poetic Mind*, p. 139.

others. Finally, he will discover the words and phrases that will express the value of his experiences and convey them to the reader.

The vision of the author is directed toward his own experiences. The events of his life, the people he has known, the places he has visited or read about, the thoughts he has had will all present themselves to him. His memory of all these matters will be very keen. Images of all kinds will, if he lets them, crowd upon him, in varying degrees of sharpness. Psychologists tell us that the images that come through the avenues of the senses will differ in different persons. We may be good visualizers; or our tactual or auditory images may be strong and accurate, or, more rarely, the images of taste and smell. We speak commonly of the "mind's eye"; we might speak also of the mind's ear or finger or tongue or nose. These senses of ours are alert and busy all the time; we are constantly receiving the impressions from which our images arise.

But imagination, as we use it in connection with artistic achievement, is not mere memory, not the images, not even merely the ability to form or call up images. All these enter into the imaginative process, but no one of them is coextensive with it. The artist, by means of his imagination, selects for use certain elements from these scattered and multitudinous experiences. This choice is exercised on definite principles. The writer selects that material which is interesting, beautiful, useful, and significant to himself and to others.³ If he is writing merely to express himself, as some claim an

³ It must be remembered that the choice of material, like the choice of details, is sometimes an unconscious, an involuntary process, and sometimes a process definitely controlled and directed by the conscious will. For an illuminating discussion of the working of Coleridge's "shaping spirit of Imagination," see Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu*.

author does and should do, he will probably find most of his experiences suited for that self-expression. Almost everything that comes to us with sufficient force to impress us is valuable to us. But as a matter of fact, few writers consider only themselves. They are conscious of an urgent desire to speak through their art to others; like Horace they long to build a monument more lasting than bronze; like Shelley, they implore some power to drive their dead thoughts over the universe. For they wish to "quicken a new birth." Therefore they must select with a view to finding that which shall have interest, beauty, use, and meaning for others. This choice will be governed, of course, by the principles regarding the content values of literature that have been set forth in the preceding chapters. And it will be through the imagination that they will recognize the intellectual, ethical, and emotional values of experience. In sense impressions, in human contacts, in thoughts, in all the varied impingements upon his consciousness, the artist will be aware of significances that are hidden to the ordinary observer. The imaginative vision must be keen; it must also be complex. The poet Blake said that it must be a double vision:

For double the vision my eyes do see,
And a double vision is given to me.
With my inward eye, 'tis an Old Man grey,
With my outward, a Thistle across my way.

Sometimes that vision is fourfold,—

Now I a fourfold vision see,
And a fourfold vision is given to me;
'Tis fourfold in my supreme delight,
And threefold in soft Beulah's night,
And twofold always.—May God us keep
From single vision and Newton's sleep!*

* *Epistle to Thomas Butts*, "With Happiness stretched across the hills."

The single vision, as Blake regards it, is the result of the mere evidence of the senses. This vision Blake distrusts; he associates it with science. It will lead to "Newton's sleep," not to the inspiration of Los, the God of Poetry; it is inadequate and deceiving. Blake sees not with but through the eye. His double vision adds to the physical an intellectual appreciation; the triple sight penetrates emotional values; the fourfold vision completes the tale with spiritual interpretation. To the poet all four are necessary, at least for his "supreme delight."

The material once selected, the writer must then decide how it shall be treated. It may, in the first place, be presented nearly as it was found, and we have as a result memoirs and autobiography, books of travel and natural history. But the imaginative artist does not merely reproduce these bits of experience. Interpretation must always come to the aid of memory if the product is to be real literature. It is through the imagination that the writer not only sees the value of the experience for the person who passed through it, but can translate that value into terms that will mean much to others. As was suggested in another chapter, it is not the mathematics of astronomy that moves us, but the relation of space and its contents to human life and to our personal life. The traveller or the naturalist who interprets the countries and the peoples he has visited, or the insects and the plants that he has watched in terms both of his own personality and of universal human life, is the man who will write literature.

Open Doughty's *Arabia Deserta* almost at random, and you will find in that amazing book not merely Arabia but Doughty and the whole world. Arabia is there, but it is not the Arabia that the ordinary traveller sees; Doughty brings to topography and people, to customs

and dress, that comprehensive imaginative vision that both observes and interprets. Sometimes the interpretation is in a single word,—a word that by its unusualness and its vividness surprises the reader into seeing the same vision. For example he writes, "Glad at the fall of the *empty* daylight, the householders sit again to make talk, or silent and listless, with the *drooping* gravity of brute animals."⁵ Sometimes a whole passage, through its diction and its rhythm and that almost indefinable something that makes poetry, reveals the imagination of the writer. "Tall was this fair young wife and freshly clad as a beloved; her middle small girt with a gay scarlet lace: barefoot she went upon the waste sand with a beautiful erect confidence of the hinds, in their native wilderness."⁶

There are many writers on natural history and other branches of science who manifest this same interpretative imagination. Huxley, Thoreau, Burroughs, Fabre, and William Beebe see in field and wood and stream and jungle far more than appears to the average eye. This interpretation is usually gained at no sacrifice of scientific accuracy. Mr. Beebe has given the spirit of his own work and that of other scientific men of imaginative vision in a paragraph in "Mangrove Mystery,"⁷ in which he compares what he has seen in a mangrove jungle with what has been recorded about *Rhizophora Mangle* by the botanists. He pleads for what he calls a different contact of thought, which should vitalize scientific fact and yet never fall into sentimentality. The whole book, *Jungle Days*, in which this paragraph occurs, is full of passages that illustrate this clearly. Read of Opalina, in

⁵ Doughty, Charles M., *Travels in Arabia Deserta*, 2nd edition, two volumes (Jonathan Cape, 1921), Vol. I, p. 260. The italics are mine.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 318.

⁷ See Beebe, William, *Jungle Days* (Putnam, 1925), pp. 116-117.

"A Chain of Jungle Life," or follow the events which take place on the scientist's jungle table or on the beach at midnight or on the mighty trunk of the fallen Etaballi. Read the conclusion of "The Life of Death," in which he sums up the cycle of life and death as it is illustrated in the history of the great tree, and expresses his realization of the impossibility of penetrating so great a mystery. That different contact of thought is what he has chosen, and the result is the work, not of the mere scientist, but of an observer, an interpreter, and a philosopher.

The material of the writer of history or biography is not, in general, the experience of the writer himself, but of others. He is dealing with facts, which he must regard not merely as bits of information, but as part of human experience, with an appeal to the emotions and an influence upon the spirit. This must be, if he is to write literature. Sometimes he will even sacrifice fact for the purpose of interpretation. Carlyle's *French Revolution* has been mentioned before as an instance of unreliable history from the point of view of the historian. But he has given his readers so intense a realization, so sympathetic an interpretation of the experience of the people of France as to make his book almost a creative masterpiece. Biography has also been treated in the same way, particularly within the last few years, which have seen a flood of "fictionized biographies." These vary in value partly as the completeness of their realization of the experience of the subject varies. Yet the fictionized history or biography is not more truly imaginative than the reliable history or the faithful biography, provided that the historian and the biographer have been endowed with the power to see the significance of events and lives and to interpret and make them real. This reality Carlyle finds one of the prime necessities of good biography.

In *Biography* he writes, "There is no need that the personages on the scene be a King and Clown; that the scene be the Forest of the Royal Oak, 'on the borders of Staffordshire:' need only that the scene lie on this old firm Earth of ours, where we also have so surprisingly arrived; that the personages be *men*, and *seen* with the eyes of a man." This reality he recognizes in Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, of which he says, in his essay on that book,

That loose-flowing, careless-looking Work of his is as a picture by one of Nature's own Artists; the best possible resemblance of a Reality; like the very image thereof in a clear mirror. Which indeed it was: let but the mirror be *clear*, this is the great point; the picture must and will be genuine. How the babbling Bozzy, inspired only by love, and the recognition and vision which love can lend, epitomises nightly the words of Wisdom, the deeds and aspects of Wisdom, and so, by little and little, unconsciously works together for us a whole *Johnsoniad*; a more free, perfect, sunlit and spirit-speaking likeness, than for many centuries had been drawn by man of man! Scarcely since the days of Homer has the feat been equalled; indeed, in many senses, this also is a kind of Heroic Poem. . . . Here again we have that old saying verified, "The heart sees farther than the head."

This imaginative vision and imaginative treatment of reality is in Barrie's *Margaret Ogilvy* or Sandburg's *Abraham Lincoln*. Strong in each of these books is the personality of the writer as well as that of the subject. Kinship, whether that of blood or that of spirit, makes it possible for the heart to see farther than the head. Such imaginative vision of reality produces greater books than the "fictionized biographies" can ever be. The latter are not faithful to facts, nor are they actually creative writing; they are neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring. They submit themselves to judgment by two standards, and they measure up to neither of them.

Yet real creation is frequently based on reality, and

in the last analysis, all creation comes of the experience of the writer. No one generates something out of nothing. A plot, in fiction, drama, or poetry, is created in the sense that the author forms it out of the elements of his experience united in new combinations, lifelike, yet unlike anything that he has ever known. What does the author start from? Often, as Shakespeare did, from a story already current or from the actual events of history. In such a case, the author's creative powers are shown by the modifications and enlargements which he makes on the material that he takes, and even more, perhaps, by the characters which he invents to carry out the plot. Often an author uses either his own life or that of someone he knows or knows of as a basis for his story; in such a case the sequence of events in general is predetermined, but the selection of material and the arrangement of it into an artistic whole as well as the portrayal of character are in the hands of the writer. Sometimes the suggestion for the plot comes from some other book or from some one incident in real life that furnishes a hint and a starting point for the story. Every writer of fiction is constantly alert to catch such hints from his experience. He may see an old man stoop and pick up a small object from the ground and hide it under his blouse, and there, perhaps, is the starting point for *A Piece of String*. He wonders what happened to Portia and Bassanio after they were married, and writes *The Lady of Belmont*. He hears the tradition that Shelley was not drowned, and he brings him to America, as does Elinor Wylie in *The Orphan Angel*. On such foundations the whole plot is built up, a creation in every sense of the word, but a creation based on actuality. Finally, a writer of fiction may put a plot together out of scattered elements of experience that in reality never went together. His con-

structive power enables him to make a novel or a play out of what we commonly call his "imagination." He actually creates a plot with no help, as far as the story is concerned, from other books or from real life. He may even combine elements not rationally connected, visualize events outside the realm of actual experience. He may make a tale of the supernatural, even of the impossible. We call this the result of fancy. Yet in either case, whether the plot is possible or impossible, even in the wildest flights of fancy, the atoms that go to make up the substance of the plot are real and are found somewhere in the experience of the writer. His creative power lies in his ability to combine.

Similarly the author creates character on the basis of his actual experience. The character may be like no one that the writer has ever known or seen, but surely he is made up of elements gathered from his creator's experience, a detail here, a detail there, selected and interpreted and combined into a lifelike person, a real creation. The writer may present to his readers his own character in the form of the protagonist of his story. Or he may use some person whom he has known as the model for his portrait. Or he may go to history or legend for character as well as plot. But whoever the character is, whether Becky Sharp, or David Copperfield, or Dinah Morris, or Cleopatra, or Prometheus, the imaginative power of the author will be manifested in his combination of the elements of this character into a person of life and reality.

The resulting character will depend, of course, largely upon the individual interpretation which the writer puts upon the material at his disposal in his reading or his personal experience. This point may be most easily illustrated by examining the interpretation of character in

cases where several writers are using the same material, a figure of history or legend. Shakespeare's Cleopatra, for instance, with her "infinite variety," is not Dryden's conventional lover. Shakespeare's comprehensive soul delighted in the complexity of his Cleopatra; Dryden's narrower and shallower mind and his sense of order produce a queen whose character is more single, more simple, more regular. The creation of character here—for each dramatist is a true creator—is controlled by the personal interpretation of the author. And Shaw's childish Cleopatra is still another Queen of Egypt. Of the figure of Prometheus, as he appears in the poetry of three great poets, Herford says, "Goethe . . . treated Prometheus as a type of Man's shaping intellect, Byron . . . as a symbol of his heroic endurance. Shelley's Prometheus unites both qualities with others more purely Shelleyan—the defiance which Goethe 'could make no use of,' the love which Byron lacked."⁸ Those who know the work of Goethe, Byron, and Shelley will recognize immediately how personal was the interpretation of each. Faust, as he appears in the dramas by Marlowe and Goethe, Lancelot, as we see him in Malory, in the *Idylls of the King*, in Edwin Arlington Robinson's *Lancelot*, and in John Erskine's *Galahad*, are other illustrations of personal interpretation. Even the Garden of Eden and the mother of the human race are subject to new, personal interpretations. Here is Milton's picture of Adam and Eve, as Satan first saw them:

Two of far nobler shape, erect and tall,
God-like erect, with native honour clad
In naked majesty, seemed lords of all,
And worthy seemed; for in their looks divine

⁸ Herford, C. H., *The Age of Wordsworth*, 14th edition (London, G. Bell and Sons, 1922), p. 246.

The image of their glorious Maker shon,
 Truth, wisdom, sanctitude severe and pure—
 Severe, but in true filial freedom placed,
 Whence true authority in men. . . .
 She, as a veil down to the slender waist,
 Her unadorned golden tresses wore
 Dishevelled, but in wanton ringlets waved
 As the vine curls her tendrils. . . .
 Adam the goodliest man of men since born
 His sons; the fairest of her daughters Eve.⁹

And here is the way Ralph Hodgson describes Eve:

Eve, with her basket, was
 Deep in the bells and grass,
 Wading in bells and grass
 Up to her knees,
 Picking a dish of sweet
 Berries and plums to eat,
 Down in the bells and grass
 Under the trees.

Mute as a mouse in a
 Corner the cobra lay,
 Curled round a bough of the
 Cinnamon tall. . . .
 Now to get even and
 Humble proud heaven and
 Now was the moment or
 Never at all.

"Eva!" Each syllable
 Light as a flower fell,
 "Eva!" he whispered the
 Wondering maid,
 Soft as a bubble sung
 Out of a linnet's lung,
 Soft and most silverly
 "Eva!" he said.

Picture that orchard sprite,
 Eve, with her body white,
 Supple and smooth to her
 Slim finger tips,

⁹ *Paradise Lost*, Book IV, ll. 288-295, 304-307, 323-324.

Wondering, listening,
Listening, wondering,
Eve with a berry
Half-way to her lips.

Oh had our simple Eve
Seen through the make-believe!
Had she but known the
Pretender he was!
Out of the boughs he came,
Whispering still her name,
Tumbling in twenty rings
Into the grass.

Here was the strangest pair
In the world anywhere,
Eve in the bells and grass
Kneeling, and he
Telling his story low. . . .
Singing birds saw them go
Down the dark path to
The Blasphemous Tree.

Oh, what a clatter when
Titmouse and Jenny Wren
Saw him successful and
Taking his leave!
How the birds rated him,
How they all hated him!
How they all pitied
Poor motherless Eve!

Picture her crying
Outside in the lane,
Eve, with no dish of sweet
Berries and plums to eat,
Haunting the gate of the
Orchard in vain. . . .
Picture the lewd delight
Under the hill to-night—
"Eva!" the toast goes round,
"Eva!" again.²⁰

As Mr. Untermeyer has said, "This Eve is neither the conscious sinner nor the symbolic Mother of men; she is,

²⁰ From *Poems* (Macmillan, 1917), pp. 8-10.

in Hodgson's candid lines, any young, English country girl—filling her basket, regarding the world and the serpent itself with a frank and childlike wonder.”¹¹ This is not the mother of the human race, but “poor motherless Eve.” Milton and Hodgson have given us two totally different pictures of innocence.

As is clear throughout this chapter, the personal interpretation of the author controls his imaginative treatment of his material, whether he is representing reality in his own experience or in that of others, or whether he is creating new wholes out of scattered material. But there are also certain forms of writing in which personal experience is directly interpreted, not in the shape of true or fictitious narrative, but in the shape of subjective expression of that experience, in personal essays and lyric poems. And as in the case of the creation of character, so here there may be differences depending on the individuality and personality of the writer. Two men seldom see the same meaning in the same experience. To Keats autumn is the “season of mists and mellow fruitfulness”; Shelley greets the “wild west wind, thou breath of autumn's being”; Bryant writes,

The melancholy days are come, the saddest of the year,
Of wailing winds, and naked woods, and meadows brown and
sere.

Again how much of the personality of the writer is to be seen in each interpretation: Keats' joy in richness of warmth and color is so great that he could never see sadness in the glow of autumn; the high winds of autumn called to Shelley's free spirit; Bryant felt the gentle melancholy of the dying year. So it is with many other ex-

¹¹ Untermeyer, Louis (ed.), *Modern British Poetry*, revised and enlarged edition (Harcourt, Brace and Company [c 1925]), p. 161.

periences. Herrick, concerned, like so many men in the seventeenth century, with the brevity of life and the imminence of death, saw in daffodils a symbol of the evanescence of man's existence:

Fair Daffodils, we weep to see
You haste away so soon:
As yet the early-rising Sun
Has not attain'd his noon.
Stay, stay,
Until the hasting day
Has run
But to the even-song;
And having pray'd together, we
Will go with you along.

We have short time to stay, as you,
We have as short a Spring;
As quick a growth to meet decay
As you, or anything.
We die,
As your hours do, and dry
Away
Like to the Summer's rain;
Or as the pearls of morning's dew
Ne'er to be found again.

But to Wordsworth the daffodils meant joyousness and the permanence of beauty. The familiar closing lines of his poem, *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*, bring out those two points:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

This personal imaginative interpretation, the vision which sees a meaning in experience,—a meaning for the writer, which he shares with the reader—is part of the

secret of success in the familiar essay and the lyric poem. Lamb's "almost feminine partiality for old china" results from what he sees in "that world before perspective—a china tea-cup." He sees not only "those little, lawless, azure-tinctured grotesques" "through the lucid atmosphere of fine Cathay," but the whole meaning of comparative riches and comparative poverty. And the charm of his essay, *Old China*, rests upon the way in which he has interpreted his experience. The simplest of objects or incidents may open up a whole world of meaning. As Blake put it,

To see a World in a grain of sand,
And Heaven in a wild flower.

The vision may be simpler, less comprehensive, as in Robert Frost's familiar *Dust of Snow*.¹²

Here, and in Lamb's essay, the interpretation of the writer's experience is presented directly, without figures of speech. Often, however, the experience is associated or compared with some other experience in order to make clear the meaning which the artist has found therein. In prose this method is illustrated in much of Mr. Beebe's writing and in many of the brief essays by Logan Pearsall Smith in *Trivia*. The despair of youth before the unsympathetic disapproval of his elders is well interpreted by association in Mr. Smith's *Stonehenge*. This method of association is used very frequently in poetry. A sonnet often interprets an idea or a mood by means of associating it with bits of experience in some other and usually some more familiar or perhaps more concrete realm. Shakespeare, for instance, in the sonnet beginning "That time of year thou mayst in me behold," interprets the fact and the feeling of old age by associating it with

¹² Quoted on pages 191-192.

winter, twilight, and the dying fire. Another illustration is Mr. Frost's *Nothing Gold Can Stay*. And Adelaide Crapsey's brief poem, by title and question, interprets through association:

ON SEEING WEATHER-BEATEN TREES²³

Is it as plainly in our living shown,
By slant and twist, which way the wind hath blown?

The necessity of interpreting his material is the force which guides the imaginative writer also in the selection of details. Those details must, of course, be in harmony with the purpose of the artist; nothing may be chosen that is irrelevant to the whole which he has planned. Irrelevancy in expository writing obscures the thinking; in description it blurs the picture; in narrative it leads the reader into blind alleys. Once again we may use Lang's *Scythe Song* as an example of what not to do. With the desire to present an atmosphere and create a mood of peace and calm and resignation, he should never have chosen the word *blithe* to end the first line. The rest of the poem, on the other hand, as we have already seen, contains details no one of which is irrelevant to the main purpose of the poet. It is much easier (and, indeed, more profitable) to find in printed literature examples of what should be done than of what should not, for selection of relevant details is one of the primary laws of artistic composition, and few are the artists who neglect it. In Milton's description of Satan in the first book of *Paradise Lost*, for example, each detail is relevant to the poet's main purpose,—to present a fallen angel. These two characteristics, his angelic nature and

²³ Reprinted from *Verses* by Adelaide Crapsey by and with permission of and special arrangement with Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., authorized publishers.

his fallen state, are responsible for every stroke of the brush:

He, above the rest
In shape and gesture proudly eminent,
Stood like a tower. His form had yet not lost
All her original brightness, nor appeared
Less than Archangel ruined, and the excess
Of glory obscured: as when the sun new-risen
Looks through the horizontal misty air
Shorn of his beams, or from behind the moon,
In dim eclipse, disastrous twilight sheds
On half the nations, and with fear of change
Perplexes monarchs. Darkened so, yet shon
Above them all the Archangel: but his face
Deep scars of thunder had intrenched, and care
Sat on his faded cheek, but under brows
Of dauntless courage, and considerate pride
Waiting revenge.

Here even the protracted epic simile of the sun is not irrelevant, for the threat of the sun in eclipse is comparable to the threat in Satan's dimmed grandeur. He too "disastrous twilight sheds." Similarly every detail in Thomas Burke's *A Russian Night* emphasizes the contrast between the Slavic and the Cockney, which is the backbone of the picture. For instance,

As I was passing a cruel-looking passage, a gang of lads and girls stepped forward. One of the girls looked at me. Her face had the melancholy of Russia, but her voice was as the voice of Cockaigne. For she spoke and said—

"Funny-looking little guy, ain't you?"

And again,

The room, on which the wallpaper hung in dank strips, contained a full-sized bed and a chair bedstead, a washstand, a samovar, a potpourri of a carpet, and certain mysteries of feminine toilet.¹⁴

¹⁴ Burke, Thomas, *Nights in Town* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd.; New York: Henry Holt & Co. [1925]), pp. 245-246.

Some details may be quite relevant to the purpose of the artist, but at the same time quite unnecessary. Descriptive poetry is too apt to err in this respect. Literally, there are places in landscape poetry where you cannot see the wood for the trees. Some of the passages in Thomson's *Seasons* are so cumbered with detail that they fail to give a clear picture; no item is irrelevant, but many of them are unnecessary. Contrast the lines at the beginning of Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*, with their sparing use of detail:

The day is come when I again repose
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view
These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts
Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see
These hedgerows, hardly hedgerows, little lines
Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,
Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!

Our senses are limited; we do not see everything in an object that we observe, and the function of art is to select those details which would naturally strike our attention and present them clearly to us. Art is not photography; it does not include everything that is visible to the eye. The picture of a flower that shows the insects crawling on the leaves, the drop of water on the petal, both of them so real that the beholder draws back from the insects, and looks to see if there is some actual source for the moisture, is clever drawing, but not great art.¹⁵

In fact, in the selection of detail lies the very essence of art. Art is representation rather than careful imitation. The test of great art is not in its ability to deceive us into thinking that we are in the presence of reality;

¹⁵ Cf. Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, Part IV, Chapter 2.

we do not wish to be cheated, like the birds, into pecking at the grapes of Zeuxis. We recognize always that we are in the presence of something made by man's artistic skill. There are certain artistic conventions that we are ready to accept. No matter how far realism may go on the stage, we are aware that the fourth wall is not there; no matter how perfect the picture may be, we know that there is a frame around it. Hence we are ready to accept the suppression of certain details, the enhancement of others for artistic ends. We want, not a faithful imitation, but an interpretation. We may differ with the artist as to the details that should be suppressed or emphasized; such difference of opinion, which is a matter of interpretation, necessarily affects our liking for the picture, the play, or the poem.

Poets may differ among themselves in their selection of detail to describe similar scenes. Keats and Coleridge offer excellent examples of this point. Keats describes the window in Madeline's chamber with a loving delight in each separate detail that forms a whole rich in color and definite.

A casement high and triple-arch'd there was,
All garlanded with carven imag'ries,
Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
As are the tiger-moth's deep-damask'd wings;
And in the midst, 'mongst thousand heraldries,
And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,
A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and kings.

Some of these details may be in themselves trivial, but they all are significant either for creating a clear and complete picture or for producing an emotional effect. They enhance the sense of luxurious warmth and comfort and beauty which is the main tone of the poem. Yet

Coleridge, in describing the chamber of Christabel, finds no need for specific detail:

The moon shines dim in the open air,
And not a moonbeam enters here.
But they without its light can see
The chamber carved so curiously,
Carved with figures strange and sweet,
All made out of the carver's brain,
For a lady's chamber meet:
The lamp with twofold silver chain
Is fastened to an angel's feet.

The poet here relies upon the very suppression of detail to produce a vague feeling of horror which is the tone of this poem. The one definite bit of description, that of the lamp fastened to an angel's feet, is chosen because it suggests the divine power which wars against Geraldine. A similar comparison might be made between Keats' description of the discovery of the snake-woman in *Lamia*, with all its wealth of detail, and Coleridge's lines which picture a similar scene, closing with those vague but highly suggestive words,

Beautiful exceedingly.

Indeed, Coleridge is a master of suggestion. By the suppression of detail he gets an effect of horror almost unsurpassed in poetry. Those familiar lines, again from *Christabel*, are from the hand—or rather, from the “shaping spirit of Imagination”—of genius:

Her silken robe, and inner vest,
Dropt to her feet, and full in view,
Behold! her bosom and half her side—
A sight to dream of, not to tell!
O shield her! shield sweet Christabel!

In order to be sure that both suppression and selection of detail are the result of art, not chance, it is instruc-

tive to examine the two versions, those of 1798 and 1800, of a passage in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. In the earlier text the description of the phantom ship and of Death and Life-in-Death read as follows:

Are those *her* naked ribs, which fleck'd
The sun that did behind them peer?
And are those two all, all the crew,
That woman and her fleshless Pheere?

His bones were black with many a crack,
All black and bare, I ween;
Jet-black and bare, save where with rust
Of mouldy damps and charnel crust
They're patch'd with purple and green.

Her lips are red, *her* looks are free,
Her locks are yellow as gold:
Her skin is as white as leprosy,
And she is far liker Death than he;
The flesh makes the still air cold.

The naked Hulk alongside came
And the Twain were playing dice;
"The Game is done! I've won, I've won!"
Quoth she, and whistled thrice.

A gust of wind sterte up behind
And whistled thro' his bones;
Thro' the holes of his eyes and the hole of his mouth
Half-whistles and half-groans.

With never a whisper in the Sea
Off darts the Spectre-ship;
While clombe above the Eastern bar
The horned Moon, with one bright Star
Almost atween the tips.

When Coleridge revised it, he made a number of changes:

Are those *her* ribs through which the Sun
Did peer, as through a grate?
And is that Woman all her crew?
Is that a Death? and are there two?
Is Death that woman's mate?

Her lips were red, *her* looks were free,
Her locks were yellow as gold:
Her skin was as white as leprosy,
The Nightmare Life-in-Death was she,
Who thicks man's blood with cold.

The naked hulk alongside came,
And the twain were casting dice;
"The game is done! I've won! I've won!"
Quoth she, and whistles thrice.

The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out:
At one stride comes the dark;
With far-heard whisper, o'er the sea,
Off shot the spectre-bark.

.
Till clomb above the eastern bar
The horned Moon, with one bright star
Within the nether tip.

In the first place, he has omitted certain details. The two stanzas which describe Death have gone. Of the two, Life-in-Death was the significant figure; the detailed description of Death detracted from the force of the horror of Life-in-Death, and it was composed of nothing but conventional charnel-house details. It was merely horrible, without much suggestive power over the emotions, and it was quite unnecessary. On the other hand he has gained enormously in emotional power by changing the last two lines of the first stanza into a series of definite questions and by using specific names in the second stanza of the final version. Note too that he has added that vivid, active description of the swift transition from day to night in the tropics, and that he has made a wise choice of detail in the line,

Who thicks man's blood with cold,

far more personal and therefore more horrible in its suggestion than

The flesh makes the still air cold.

The far-heard whisper is a more suggestive detail than the absence of sound; it continues the startling effect of the Woman's whistle. And finally, at the sacrifice of astronomical accuracy,¹⁶ he has placed that one bright star definitely "within the nether tip." This is the way that genius works.¹⁷ Not often are we fortunate enough to be able to watch the process. When we have successive revisions, as here, or the corrected manuscript as in the case of *The Eve of St. Agnes*, we have something invaluable to the student and the critic. Read the first attempts at the stanza in Keats' poem that describes the feast, and see how the poet worked in every case to more and more specific and significant detail. Usually, however, we are forced to study the completed masterpiece and to guess from that what must have been the process of the writer's mind. Every erasure or blotting was, we feel, a step toward more significant imaginative treatment.

In narrative also the choice of detail is exceedingly important. Again it may be that details which are trivial in themselves are chosen for some artistic purpose. As in description, they may be selected for their emotional power. Or they may be used for the purpose of making the narrative more convincing. This is particularly true in stories which aim at the presentation of strange and

¹⁶ But in accordance with observed phenomena. See Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu*, p. 180.

¹⁷ It is interesting to note that in one instance Coleridge sacrificed exactness of detail to phrasing. In the 1817 edition of *The Ancient Mariner in Sybilline Leaves*, he substituted for the line, "The furrow followed free," the more exact line, "The furrow stream'd off free," saying that he had "perceived that this (the former image) was the image as seen by a spectator from the shore, or from another vessel. From the ship itself the *Wake* appears like a brook flowing off from the stern." But in 1828 he restored the first line because he found it more musical.

unusual events as if they were real. Swift, for instance, well knew the value of circumstantial detail. What an illusion of actuality is given to the story of Gulliver's adventures in the land of Lilliput by all the careful enumeration of the articles in the pockets of the Man-Mountain, and the accurate calculation of the size of his person and his possessions on the ratio of twelve to one. Gulliver is careful to tell us that he set sail from Lilliput "on the twenty-fourth day of September, 1701, at six in the morning." He gives us all details about the ship that picked him up: "The vessel was an English merchantman returning from Japan by the North and South Seas; the Captain, Mr. John Biddel of Deptford, a very civil man, and an excellent sailor." And he slyly makes Richard Sympson in the prefatory note, "The Publisher to the Reader," say of Mr. Gulliver's narrative,

The only fault I find is, that the author, after the manner of travelers, is a little too circumstantial. There is an air of truth apparent through the whole. . . . The volume would have been twice as large, if I had not made bold to strike out innumerable passages relating to the winds and tides, as well as to the variations and bearings in the several voyages; together with the minute descriptions of the management of the ship in storms, in the style of sailors; likewise the account of longitudes and latitudes.

The good Richard had an efficient imagination; he knew what to strike out and what to leave untouched!

A single detail, not obviously of much importance, may be highly significant in revealing character. Three brief pictures might be cited from *Anna Karenina*. The first is of Princess Tverskóy: " 'Please, bring us the tea to the small drawing-room,' she said, half-closing her eyes as she always did when she spoke to a lackey." ¹⁸ Of

¹⁸ Tolstoy, Count Leo N., *Anna Karenin*, tr. by Leo Wiener (Dent, [c 1904]), Vol. II, p. 95.

Vronski this passage is equally revealing: "He put down his legs, crossed one knee over the other, and, taking it into his hand, touched the firm calf of his leg, which he had bruised the day before in his fall. . . . It gave him pleasure to feel this light pain in his strong leg."¹⁹ And no long analysis could so well present the character of Anna's brother as the mention of the otherwise totally unnecessary cigarette case in the following: "'Do I disturb you?' said Stepán Arkádevich, who, at the sight of his brother-in-law, suddenly experienced an unaccustomed feeling of confusion. To conceal it, he drew out a newly bought cigarette case *with a new way of opening it*, and, smelling at the leather, took a cigarette from it."²⁰ Here, and especially in the words that have been italicized, is no mere stage direction, but a portrait in miniature.

The selection of details may serve a mere æsthetic purpose, that is, the purpose of giving delight in the details themselves, irrespective of their usefulness in furthering the narrative, revealing character, creating atmosphere, arousing emotion. Illustrations may be found in many poets: Swinburne, for example, was often more concerned with the æsthetic value of his details than with their relevancy to the thought of his poem. The long epic similes of Homer and Vergil, or of those who, in more recent poetry, have used the same device, elaborate the details of the second member of the comparison, not, apparently, out of any sense of their value in clarifying the picture, but out of sheer joy in their beauty. Among the older English poets is Spenser, the "splendidly superfluous." What need is there to take a whole stanza to describe the scales of the dragon? Yet who would give

¹⁹ *Anna Karenin*, Vol. II, p. 120.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 296.

up the æsthetic pleasure that comes from those vivid details?

These are the first activities of the imaginative writer. He sees with more than single, physical vision; he chooses, on the basis of that multiple vision, the material he wishes. He presents with little modification the material he finds in the writer's own experience or in reality outside of his personal experience; or he creates out of the scattered elements of experience. He interprets all this material, however presented, in the light of its significance for himself. He selects the details of the chosen material with certain definite ends in view. When he has done all this, he finds his next task in the shaping of the material into artistic wholes, and his final task in discovering the words in which to appeal to the imagination of the reader.

CHAPTER VII

IMAGINATIVE CONSTRUCTION

HAVING decided how he will treat the material he has chosen from his experience, the writer has by no means completed his task. His world is not created by a fortuitous concourse of atoms; it is the result of that constructive imaginative power by which he shapes out of the elements of experience an artistic whole that shall, by its very structure, influence the reader's imagination. That whole may be large or small, simple or elaborate, but whatever it is, its effect as a totality will be of great importance.¹

We find a keen intellectual pleasure as well as an æsthetic pleasure in a well constructed whole. If the parts are properly harmonized and properly balanced, if the entire work of art is well rounded and completed, not only is our sense of beauty appealed to, but our desire for rightness and adequacy is satisfied. Beautiful details, badly put together, give one a sense of æsthetic frustration and intellectual disappointment.

When a writer has chosen his material and has determined the manner of his treatment, there still remains the problem of the form into which he shall put it. He has created characters and woven a plot about their fortunes. Shall he make out of their story a novel, a play,

¹ Cf. Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu*, p. 305: "But the energy which made the poem a poem, rather than an assemblage of radiant images, was the capacity of the human brain to think through chaos, and by sheer force of the driving will behind it to impose upon confusion the clarity of an ordered whole."

or a narrative poem? If he chooses the play, shall it be in verse or in prose? If he decides upon the poem, what shall be its metrical form? He has an idea which he wishes to convey to others. Shall he embody it in a reflective or didactic poem or in an essay?

All these processes of selection, treatment, and construction are not necessarily conscious. Sometimes, however, we know that they are. Milton's note-books, for instance, show how he meditated on the problem of the suitable form for his story of the fall of man. At first he had intended to put it into dramatic form, and had sketched a synopsis of the scenes. His final choice of the structure of the epic poem we feel was right. The subject was similar to, even greater than, those of the great epics that had preceded his. Here was a story, not merely of a national hero, but of a world hero. The epic form, then, was eminently suitable. And no drama could possibly give the magnificent sweep of imagination and feeling that we find in *Paradise Lost*. A drama whose stage was the entire universe, Heaven, Hell, Chaos, and the Stellar World, would inevitably have failed in the representation. We should not be content to have Hell represented, after the fashion of the mediæval guild play, by the yawning mouth of a *papier-mâché* dragon. And even in the reading we should feel the length of the speeches and miss the brilliant passages of description that contribute in such important measure to the beauty of the poem. All these disadvantages it would have been difficult to overcome. Hardy has grappled with a similar problem; but his *Dynasts* is a poem rather than a play. An epic was indubitably the suitable form for Milton's purpose. Some authors have used the drama when they should not. This is not true of all closet drama, for frequently a play that was not intended to be produced,

such as Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, loses nothing in lyrical beauty by reason of its dramatic form. Or, like his *The Cenci*, for the production of which the possibilities are extremely limited, it may gain in power from the restraint imposed upon it by the use of dialogue. But Wordsworth should never have written the story of *The Borderers* as a play. There is no action, there are few scenes that have dramatic value. We should experience little pleasure in witnessing it; our pleasure in reading it is to be found in regarding it as a poem. It should have been in form like an episode in *The Excursion*.

For the expression of an individual, personal emotion, the natural form is the lyric. But here there are other choices involved, for the lyric has many different forms. For reflection on the object, the person, or the idea which arouses an emotion, the sonnet, with its leisurely movement and its closely knit structure, may be the best vehicle. For the expression of strong primitive feeling, the poet may choose free verse. Lighter, more transient and superficial moods and attitudes may be set in the elaborately artificial form of the villanelle, or the triolet, or the sestina. The sweeping movement of the terza rima, with its long lines and recurring rhymes, Shelley chose wisely for his *Ode to the West Wind*. The modified ballad stanza, with its shortened last line, is the best possible form for Keats' story of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. The nature of the subject puts it with the ballads. And the poet has embodied the sense of frustration and incompleteness in the fourth line of each stanza.

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.²

² Mr. de la Mare in a lecture given at Johns Hopkins University in 1924, illustrated very graphically the difference in effect which an

For reflective, expository, or didactic poems, blank verse or the heroic couplet, with their regular logical progression, may be the most suitable metrical structure. Dryden, who used the heroic couplet with such masterly control, wrote at the end of his *Religio Laici*,

And this unpolish'd, rugged verse, I chose,
As fittest for discourse, and nearest prose.

Not usually, however, is the heroic couplet unpolished and rugged. In its highly polished form, as it appears in the work of Dryden and Pope, it is one of the best vehicles for satire. Its epigrammatic force, its possibilities for balance and antithesis, the emphasis which it naturally brings upon the rhyme all serve to point the satire. An illustration is found in the couplet from Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*:

Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong;
Was everything by starts, and nothing long;

or in Pope's attack upon Addison, in the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*:

Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,
And without sneering teach the rest to sneer;
Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,
Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike;
Alike reserv'd to blame or to commend,
A tim'rous foe, and a suspicious friend;
Dreading ev'n fools; by flatterers besieged,
And so obliging that he ne'er obliged.

alteration in the order of words and in metrical structure may make, by suggesting here a change from iambic to trochaic rhythm in the first and third lines, making them

Knight-at-arms, O what can ail thee,

and

From the lake the sedge has wither'd.

At once the poem is sentimentalized and made commonplace. As Mr. de la Mare said, "The ghost of Longfellow is haunting Keats." Quoted by permission of Mr. de la Mare.

The ottava rima, also, as Byron knew, is effective for satire. Its final couplet is capable of some of the same effects as those of the single units of the poem written in heroic measure. Each stanza may carry a sting in its tail, a sting often somewhat modified by Byron's humorous use of polysyllabic rhymes:

Such names at present cut a convict figure,
The very Botany Bay in moral geography;
Their loyal treason, renegado rigour,
Are good manure for their more bare biography.
Wordsworth's last quarto, by the way, is bigger
Than any since the birthday of typography;
A drowsy frowzy poem, call'd the "*Excursion*,"
Writ in a manner which is my aversion.³

Whether verse or prose is more suitable for certain material is a problem that is harder of solution to the satisfaction of everyone than any of these questions about the proper type of literature or the most effective metrical structure. The lower limits of poetry are inevitably fixed by individuals at different levels. The discussion of this matter must be left largely to the chapter on poetry itself. But we may note here that there are occasional passages of prose which we say should have been written in verse, and more frequent passages of verse which we say should have been written in prose. Prose has such a wide scope and is capable of such a variety of beautiful effects, that we seldom feel that it is an unsuitable form for the expression of any kind of experience. We recognize this fact by speaking, with approval, of poetic prose. But the opposite phrase, prosaic poetry, is one of condemnation. Poetry seems to us at once a more limited and a more elevated kind of writing, and there are subjects which many of us feel should be treated not in verse but in prose. Such is the rather

³ *Don Juan*, Canto III, Stanza 94.

general attitude toward the verse "essays" of the neo-classic period. Why should criticism, philosophy, and theology be put into verse? The answer lies partly in the conditions of the age. Modern prose was in its infancy, and had not the chance of so wide an audience as verse. Pope, in the prefatory note to *An Essay on Man*, gives two reasons why he chose for his poem the structure of verse rather than prose. One is a personal reason, that he could express himself more concisely thus; the other has significance in connection with this problem of ours: "that principles, maxims, or precepts, so written, both strike the reader more strongly at first, and are more easily retained by him afterwards." And when we consider the *Essay on Man* and the *Essay on Criticism*, we realize how true this is. The effectiveness of each poem lies, not in what is said, but in the manner of saying it. "What oft was thought" could not be so impressive or so memorable if couched in prose; its power over our minds rests on the fact that it was "ne'er so well expressed."

Short poems, lyrical or descriptive, as well as long didactic ones, sometimes give the impression that the idea has been put into the wrong box. We turn over the pages of a second-rate poet, and wonder why some of the subjects there treated ever moved him to poetic expression. Of course the significance of a poem may lie, not in the subject but in the treatment. The imaginative interpretation of a commonplace subject may redeem it from commonplaceness; but it does not necessarily make a poem. Much good prose, it has been wisely said, has been spoiled to make poor poetry.

In the general requirements for good structure in literary art, there have been two extremes, those of classic formality and of modern formlessness. Inheriting from Aristotle and from Horace, the formal critics of the Ren-

aissance and of the neo-classic period laid down laws for the construction of drama and poetry. Unity, magnitude, and completeness had been the three main requirements for dramatic construction, according to Aristotle and his interpreters. The plot must represent an action that is organically unified; it must be great but not so great that the parts and the whole cannot be easily embraced by memory; it must be a whole, with beginning, middle, and end. The plot may be uninvolved, that is, incident may follow incident in a single continuous movement, but care must be taken not to let it become merely episodic, with neither probability nor necessity in the sequence of events,—the worst possible kind of plot. Or it may be involved, consisting of the contrivance of a change of fortune attended by a reversal of situation or discovery either of the identity of certain of the characters or the causes of the events in the story. But even in the involved type of plot there is no underplot; the complication rests upon the fact that the change of fortune arises from the structure of the plot itself, and is not merely the last incident in it. Epic poetry, too, says Aristotle, must have dramatic structure. The great epic poem is not a chronicle, but a unit, with a plot, like that of tragedy, involved or uninvolved. The models for epic structure are the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the first an example of the uninvolved plot, the second of the involved type. The epic is longer than the tragedy, of course, but its increase in bulk is possible because it contains narrative and not merely dialogue and representation of action. It must still be possible for the reader to embrace the beginning and the ending of the story in one view.

Horace repeated and developed these same ideas. "Let all you write be one and of a piece," he says. He added

little that was new on the subject of construction, except for a few minor points that were largely technical, such as the precept that a play should have only five acts. His most memorable contribution to the subject was the statement that the writer of epic, like Homer, should not take too great a subject and should not begin at the beginning (*ab ovo*), but should plunge *in medias res*. By so doing, he will be able to unite all parts, the beginning, the middle, and the end. Anyone familiar with the structure of the *Odyssey* or the *Æneid* will see at once the application of this statement. Vergil, for instance, begins his story with the shipwreck of Æneas on the shores of Carthage. From that time to the final victory over Turnus, about a year elapses. But by the device which is technically known as an episode, in this instance by means of the story which Æneas tells to Dido, we learn of the fall of Troy and of all the events of those ten years during which Æneas was wandering over the seas. And through the prophecy of Anchises we see far into the future, down to the time of Augustus. Thus the poet knits his whole subject together into a very small compass, and secures unity, and at the same time produces an effect of magnitude. This is not merely the tale of a year in the life of Æneas; it is the story of the downfall of Troy and the building up from its ruins of the empire of Rome.

Here was the model for the structure of all epic poems. Vida, whose *Art of Poetry* was a text book for critics and writers of the Renaissance, found it so. The poet, he believed, must be trained to follow Vergil, for Æneas is the sum of Ulysses and Achilles, and the *Æneid* the sum of all the structural virtues. Consequently when he discusses the qualities of a good epic poem, he draws them from the practice of Vergil.

In the seventeenth century, Boileau, in another *Art of Poetry*, crystallized for the neo-classic period the rules for composition. He added to those for drama and epic poetry, instructions for the making of the pastoral, the elegy, the sonnet, the epigram, the rondeau, the ballade, the madrigal, and the satire. Every department of poetic composition was carefully circumscribed and regulated. In connection with the structure of epic and drama, his chief emphasis was on the necessity of unity. Like Aristotle, he says that beginning, middle, and end must be joined into one whole. But the neo-classic age developed the theory of unity far beyond the point which their classic models reached in criticism. Basing their theory on the practice of the Greek dramatists and upon the idea that we are ruled by reason, they insisted that the stage should observe the three unities of time, place, and action. Aristotle had insisted only on that of action. By the unities of time and place they meant that the whole action of the play should take place within twenty-four hours and that the scene should not be changed throughout. A good illustration of the observance of these unities is to be found in Dryden's *All for Love*, and the significance of them is given point by comparing it with Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, the work of what Dryden himself called "an irregular genius," or a genius uncontrolled by the rules of dramatic structure. In Shakespeare's play, the scene is shifted from Rome to Alexandria, to Misenum, to Actium, to Syria, to Rome again, in quick succession; in Dryden's the entire action takes place within the temple of Isis. *Antony and Cleopatra* covers a period of ten years; *All for Love* covers a single day, into which are crowded many events, culminating with the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra. Dryden did not always, either in theory or practice,

uphold quite so close an observance of the unities. In his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* he quotes with approval Corneille's comment upon the rules,—“how much we are limited and constrained by them, and how many beauties of the stage they banished from it.” In his own plays he modifies the unities of time and place to the point of using a brief period of time, which may be longer than twenty-four hours, and of restricting the scene, not to one place but to one general locality, a city and its environs, for example. It is within the bounds of reason, he maintains, to imagine that between the acts a night has passed or that the actors and the audience have gone from the Alhambra to the hostile camp outside the walls of Granada; it is too much to ask the audience to imagine that they have been transported across the Mediterranean or that years have elapsed in the course of a few minutes.

By analogy rules were laid down by the neo-classic age for the structure and composition of all kinds of poetry in imitation of the ancients. Aristotle and Horace had not discussed the form of lyric poetry, but the Greeks and Romans had both furnished models for the seventeenth century to follow. Pastoral elegy, for instance, was constructed on the basis of the *Idylls* of Theocritus, Moschus, and Bion, and the fifth *Eclogue* of Vergil. Hence every pastoral elegy began by lamenting the death of Lycidas or Adonais or some other shepherd and summoning all nature to mourn for him, and then shifted to a pæan of joy over his immortality. So Milton sang,

Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more,
For Lycidas, your sorrow, is not dead.

And Shelley, who was following the classic tradition in the construction of his elegy for Keats, wrote,

Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep—
He hath awakened from the dream of life.

For the ode, models were furnished by Horace and, especially for the occasional ode, by Pindar. By a curious paradox, due to a complete failure to recognize the careful and regular structure of Pindar's poems, the neo-classic "Pindarique" is the most irregular and shapeless of all the poems produced in that period. Not till Gray do we find Pindarics that observe the laws for construction of strophe, antistrophe, and epode.

The late seventeenth century best illustrates classic formalism. At that time the love of order and regularity was most general and most strong. But often in the course of literary history there appear individual writers whose sense of form is so powerful that they incline toward the extreme of formality. They may appear in the midst of an age of freedom from restrictions. Such was Ben Jonson in the Elizabethan age, or Jane Austen, with her nice feeling for orderly structure, in the Romantic Period, or Matthew Arnold, or Robert Bridges. There are signs of such feeling even in some of the writers of today. Often a swing of the pendulum toward formalism comes as the result of a reaction, individual or general, against the extreme of formlessness. The structural license and extravagance of the late Elizabethans called for chains and a strait-jacket. These the neo-classics found in the rules and the examples of the ancients. Historically this formality was very valuable. The control and restraint which were placed upon verse and prose at that time were instrumental in shaping them both into fit tools for the use of the great masters who came later.

This salutary protest, however, is not the only advantage of formality. It has an architectural value that is very satisfying. A drama or novel constructed according

to the rules is like a great Greek temple, standing by itself, complete, harmonious, dominating the landscape,—“one, great, and entire.” The book which goes to the other extreme of formlessness, the episodic play or the novel which takes its hero from the cradle to the grave, is like a row of houses, following one after the other down the street, each separate and with an individual bit of life inside of it.

This figure of speech may suggest one of the limitations of too great formality, or at least one of its dangers. The Greek temple we behold and admire, but we do not live in it. The perfection of its form may hold our whole attention, and keep us from realizing the spirit that dwells within. Even the very quality of our worship may be hurt, if we feel, as Browning did, that Greek art, by its very perfection, prevents aspiration. Yet these dangers are not necessarily attendant upon the observance of the rules. In the great dramas and epics of antiquity perfection of form is the servant to and the natural expression of other values. It is only when the attention of the artist has been turned chiefly to the consideration of his conformity to the rules that our attention is in turn drawn to the formality of the result. The unity and completeness of a great work of classic art makes us “consider and bow the head.”

On the other hand, the rules cannot fit all kinds of artistic expression of experience. They suited admirably those types of drama and poetry on which they were based, but the critics of the seventeenth century tried to apply them universally. They failed to realize that other forms of art had grown up in the centuries intervening between Aristotle and Horace and themselves, and that new kinds of writing were to appear in the future,—kinds that the classic rules could never control.

No such limitation attaches to the formlessness which is characteristic of much modern writing. Its theory, if there be one, is elastic enough to cover all eventualities, as well as all actualities. As a matter of fact, the two forms of writing in which this complete freedom from structural restraint shows itself chiefly are the novel and the drama. It has invaded the realms of poetry mainly in the matter of metrical structure. Under its influence, plots have become episodic and inclusive of what is sometimes irrelevant material, verse has become "free," and even the structure of the sentence has broken down.

The episodic plot, which has become so familiar within the last few years, is usually autobiographical or biographical in nature. It is really nothing new. The hero or heroine whose parentage and birth begin a novel and whose death or final settlement in life ends it, has for ancestors King Arthur himself, Peregrine Pickle, and Moll Flanders. The chronicle play is the forerunner of a drama like Drinkwater's *Abraham Lincoln* or *Robert E. Lee*, which is written in scenes or episodes, and is not divided into acts. The danger in such plays or novels, from the artistic point of view, lies in the possible lack of unity of impression. There may be no central theme except the biographical. The episodes are like beads strung on a thread of narrative. Should one bead be lost, it would make little difference except in length. This is, however, merely a lurking danger, not an inevitable accompaniment. There are many plots of an outwardly episodic character which are given artistic value by some unifying idea or emotion or purpose. Shaw's *Saint Joan* is of this kind. So are some of the novels or series of novels which deal not merely with the life of one person but with the successive lives of the members of several generations.

There are real sagas, like the *Forsythe Saga*, for example, or that formed by *The Matriarch* and *A Deputy Was King*, in which there is a unifying force,—the nature and power of Forsytism or the history of matriarchal control in the Rakonitz family. And those books which lack the closely knit structure of the classical drama or epic, even those which are outwardly without form, are not necessarily void. They have one great advantage, that of stimulating the imagination to a sense of reality. The plot seems more natural than that which rises to a careful climax at the center of the story and descends to an inevitable denouement at the end. It is not the work of a puppet master who pulls the strings. It is not "made up"; it is "a true story." The bits of life in the row of houses are, though they may be disconnected, bits of real life. Dryden himself recognized this advantage in the more irregular type of play. In the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, Neander, who speaks Dryden's mind, replying to Lisi-deius' championship of the French, says,

I acknowledge that the French contrive their plots more regularly, and observe the laws of comedy and decorum of the stage (to speak generally), with more exactness than the English. Farther, I deny not but he has taxed us justly in some irregularities of ours, which he has mentioned; yet, after all, I am of the opinion that neither our faults nor their virtues are considerable enough to place them above us.

For the lively imitation of nature being in the definition of a play, those which best fulfil that law ought to be esteemed superior to the others. 'Tis true, those beauties of the French poesy are such as will raise perfection higher where it is, but are not sufficient to give it where it is not: they are indeed the beauties of a statue, but not of a man. . . .

Now what, I beseech you, is more easy than to write a regular French play, or more difficult than to write an irregular English one, like those of Fletcher, or of Shakspeare? . . . I dare boldly affirm . . . that in most of the irregular plays of Shakspeare or

Fletcher . . . there is a more masculine fancy and greater spirit in the writing than there is in any of the French.

Consideration of these two extremes suggests that there may be a golden mean of form between formalism and formlessness, free from the limitations and dangers of either, partaking of the advantages of both. There is something both in the formal and the formless, provided they are the work of genius, that pleases and satisfies our sense of form. What are the elements of form in literary art?

Perhaps the prime requirement would be that of harmony of the various parts of the whole. We have already seen how important is this matter of harmony in contributing to the emotional appeal of a novel or a poem. Just as there must be nothing to destroy the main emotional effect of a poem, so there must be no part of the structure that contradicts or conflicts with another. We must not put a Gothic tower atop a Greek temple. Intentional grotesques there may be, in literature as well as in the other arts. But in that case, the apparently unharmonious parts will actually be in harmony with the main structural purpose, which is that of the grotesque, and therefore in harmony with each other. All will form together a united whole. In fact, the principle of harmony is so closely bound up with that of unity, which is a fundamental principle of all art, that there are few artists indeed who fail to observe it. There is some danger that the creator of an episodic plot will fail to secure unity in his novel or drama. But that pitfall is usually avoided by good writers. Instead of searching for many examples, therefore, of the violation of this principle, we may notice how skillfully an author secures the desired unity and harmony out of a great variety of parts.

A simple illustration is to be found in the fusing of several different stories or plots in drama or novel. Some of the Elizabethans practiced what was known to the Romans as *contaminatio*, that is, the combination of two plays or stories to make a single drama with plot and underplot. Sometimes the fusion was not complete, and it is possible to separate, without violence to either story, the scenes concerned with the two plots. Heywood's *The Captives* and *The English Traveller* are good instances. Shakespeare, on the other hand, takes two or even three plots and fuses them so completely that they seem one. *The Merchant of Venice* is a familiar example; in it are combined the two old stories of the caskets and the pound of flesh, interwoven with each other, not merely running parallel; in it is also the story of Lorenzo and Jessica, skillfully fused with both that of Shylock and Antonio and that of Bassanio and Portia. "Now what, I beseech you, is . . . more difficult than to write an irregular English play, like those of Fletcher, or of Shakspeare?" In the novel, too, there is often a combination of many different structural elements. Dickens frequently brings together into one novel more distinct stories than Shakespeare ever used in a single play. He does not always succeed perfectly in fusing them; sometimes the reader is given a feeling only of multiplicity, not of multiplicity in unity. This comparative failure was perhaps due to the fact that he published most of his novels serially, writing each installment as it was due. *A Tale of Two Cities*, which was published in book form, is, in unity of structure, superior to his other novels. Yet it contains many distinct structural elements.

Unity is secured, of course, by focussing the attention upon the central character or characters about whom the entire action of the novel or play revolves. To that central

character are linked all the other characters, all the sub-plots. This centralization may be achieved by the method of choosing a significant but brief portion of the life of the main character and by means of episodes and prophecies pointing out its significance and its focal nature. This is the technique of the classicist. Or it may be achieved by telling the entire history of his life and showing how each step in his development led to a certain point or illustrated a certain truth, which thus becomes the focus and the unifying force of the story. This first method is that of the *Æneid*, and of *Samson Agonistes*; the second is that of *Moll Flanders*, of *David Copperfield*, of *Abraham Lincoln*. By either method unity and harmony are secured out of a variety of parts.

For in structure, as in emotion, variety is desirable. Lack of variety means monotony, and a monotone is endurable only for a limited time. Cowper's *Task*, like many long poems, would be better if it were more varied. It is difficult to distinguish, in our memories, between "The Winter Morning's Walk" and "The Winter Walk at Noon." Hence our interest and attention, not stimulated by some new object or idea, flag. Some critic has called *The Private Life of Helen of Troy* the longest colloquy in the English language. In the matter of the book there is enough that is fresh and new to keep the reader stimulated. But the structure, that of dialogue, is unvaried and dangerously near to being boring. Fortunately Mr. Erskine, being an artist, knew when to stop.

Structurally, long poems run the risk of being monotonous. This structural monotony may arise, not so frequently from the sameness of the material, as in the case of *The Task*, as from the sameness of metrical form. A poem written in blank verse needs care to make it varied. Milton avoids any semblance of monotony in

Paradise Lost by varying his metrical structure. All his lines are in iambic pentameter, to be sure, but there is the utmost variety in the number and position of the main stresses and in the substitution of trochee, dactyl, spondee, or anapæst for the basic iamb. Yet the fundamental rhythm of the iambic pentameter is never lost. Other means of securing variety are Milton's frequent use of the run-on line, in which the sense is carried over from one line to another and the voice follows it, and his habit of closing one sentence and beginning a fresh one in the middle of a line. If we read the opening passage of *Paradise Lost* twice, the first time accenting equally and heavily every second syllable and making a definite pause at the end of each line, we murder both sense and music and beat out a merely monotonous rhythm. If the second time we read it naturally, with the normal stresses and divisions, we shall find a passage fundamentally metrical, but with a variety which precludes any possibility of monotony.

The heroic couplet, as used by Dryden and Pope, with the sense enclosed within the two lines, each line a unit, and few permissible substitutions, runs far more risk than blank verse of becoming monotonous. In Pope's work it often is so, but the entire poem will be saved from being boring by the brilliancy and interest of the epigrams and anti-climaxes and rapier thrusts of satire. Dryden's verse is far more various than Pope's. He uses, much more freely, the triplet, the Alexandrine, and the run-on line. His verse grew more flexible as he grew older, and in the *Fables* are passages which approximate the movement of blank verse while retaining the advantages of the strength and order of the couplet. Other users of the heroic couplet so modify and vary it that its structure is scarcely obvious. Keats' *Endymion*, Browning's *My*

Last Duchess, and Frost's *The Onset* sound to the casual ear like blank verse.

Another form of verse that may become monotonous is the Spenserian stanza, which Spenser uses in *The Faerie Queene*. Each stanza is a unit, each line within the stanza is a unit. It may easily be seen that, without some means of variation, to a poem composed of six completed books, each book containing twelve cantos, each canto approximately fifty stanzas, each stanza nine lines, such a metrical form might be a decided liability. The movement of *The Faerie Queene* has been compared to that of the ocean, with a constant ground swell or rhythm and countless colors playing over its surface. But these colors are not merely the colors of the picturesque style. Each stanza, it has been said, is like a wave, rolling up to its height in the first eight lines and breaking in the Alexandrine. And in that Alexandrine, the ninth line, lies the possibility of variation. In the first place, it is longer than the other lines in the stanza; in the second, Spenser shifts from one location to another the cæsura or pause within the line. Thus the sound of the breaking wave varies, and monotony is impossible.

Even in brief poems the poet often takes care to vary his metrical structure so that he may hold the reader's attention. A good illustration is this stanza from Ben Jonson's *A Celebration of Charis: Her Triumph*:

Have you seen but a bright lily grow,
Before rude hands have touch'd it?
Have you mark'd but the fall of the snow
Before the soil hath smutch'd it?
Have you felt the wool of the beaver?
Or swan's down ever?
Or have smelt o' the bud of the briar?
Or the nard in the fire?
Or have tasted the bag of the bee?
O so white! O so soft! O so sweet is she!

By the change from alternate to successive rhymes, by the use of the two short verses and the last long, lingering line, he has varied and enhanced his music.

Every artist, whether he works with paints or marble or musical sounds or words, knows the importance of contrast. Contrast is effective for many purposes, such as stylistic emphasis, or the delineation of character, and it is also exceedingly important in structure. It is a kind of variety which does more than merely relieve the monotony. In most narrative there is at the basis of the plot a struggle between opposites. If this is merely an internal struggle, between two parts of a man's own nature, the device of contrast is not necessarily obvious. But when an author objectifies the two opposing forces, the contrast becomes clear and it may be the structural basis of the whole story. Stevenson has made it so in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. In its simplest form, it appears in the opposition of hero and villain, on whose struggle for supremacy the entire plot is based. But it is frequently much more subtle and complicated: there are minor contrasts which cut across the main struggle; the conflicting figures or forces are not direct opposites. Shakespeare employs contrast very effectively in many of his plays. Perhaps the clearest example is the First Part of *Henry IV*. The story here is the story of the change in the character of Prince Hal when he assumes the responsibilities of his position. Here is an obvious and fundamental contrast. But involved with this are many other contrasts. Hal and Hotspur are set over against each other, Hal and Falstaff, Hal and Prince John, Hotspur and Glendower, Hotspur and Mortimer. These contrasts are partly, to be sure, of use in bringing out the characters of the individuals. But they serve a structural purpose as well. It is through the difference between Hotspur and himself,

especially when it is pointed out by his father, that Hal is brought to a resolve to be more himself.

And that shall be the day, whene'er it lights,
That this same child of honour and renown,
This gallant Hotspur, this all-praised knight,
And your unthought-of Harry chance to meet.
For every honour sitting on his helm,
Would they were multitudes, and on my head
My shames redoubled! For the time will come
That I shall make this northern youth exchange
His glorious deeds for my indignities.*

On this basis the plot proceeds, until the two young men do meet on the field of Shrewsbury. The gradual widening of the difference between Hal and Falstaff marks the change in the Prince's attitude. The differences between Hotspur and Glendower and between Hotspur and Mortimer promote the dissensions among the rebels and are partially responsible for the weakness of their cause. Thus all these character contrasts are important in the construction of the play. There is also the contrast between the serious and the comic plots. At the beginning of the play, the serious and comic scenes alternate with some regularity, but with the emphasis on the comic scenes. As the drama moves on, this emphasis changes, and, in the last act, there is no scene devoted to the comic plot; there are merely Falstaffian episodes in the midst of the serious business of the battle. This change follows the change in the Prince's interests.

As a structural device, contrast does not appear so frequently in poetry, especially in brief poems, as in fiction or drama. But in a poem of appreciable length it is often effectively used. Keats' *Eve of St. Agnes* is built up on contrasts. The youth of Madeline and Porphyro is

* *Henry IV*, Part I, Act III, Scene 2, ll. 138-146.

set over against the age of Angela and the beadsman; the warmth of Madeline's chamber against the coldness of the night; its luxuriousness against the asceticism of the beadsman; its quiet against the noise of the revelry and the storm. The poem begins and ends with age and cold and confusion; in the midst are set, like a picture in a frame, youth and warmth and color and rest. Contrast is the most important principle on which the poem as a whole is constructed.

Not only from harmony and unity, from variety and contrast, do we get that pleasant sense of form and order, but also from the recognition that a work of art is constructed upon the principle of logical sequence. This point has been elaborated in the chapter on the intellectual value of literature. It will be sufficient here to note its importance in waking an imaginative response on the part of the reader, and to mention one or two examples. If we are to have stirred in us a sense of the reality of the story we are reading, that story must be presented to us in logical order. As has been said before, there is room in literature for intentional illogicality, but even that must be logical within its own limits. Chronological order is the surest of being logical, perhaps, and those books that begin at the beginning and go straight through to the end of the life of their main characters, seldom violate the principle of logical sequence. It takes a different kind of skill to handle a more complicated plot in which various groups of characters must be treated and brought together into a single unit. What determines the author to say, as did the author of the ballad,

Let us leave talking of Litle John,
For he is bound fast to a tree,
And talke of Guy and Robin Hood
In the green woode where they bee?

It is partly, as is suggested here, the importance of suspense. The writer leaves one of his characters bound to a tree, and we do not know what happens to him until somewhat later. But he also moves naturally to take up the thread of the story of the man who is destined to be his rescuer, that he may bring rescued and rescuer together at the proper time, with their stories complete behind them. These principles, applied with more subtlety, are evident in the work of good writers. If we study Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*, Hugo's *Toilers of the Sea*, we shall find that there is always an excellently logical reason for the movement from one group of characters to another. The imagination of the reader naturally follows that of the writer in the weaving together of the various elements of the plot.

A story which moves logically from one point to another arrives finally at a climax, which, if it is properly handled, stimulates the imagination of the reader to realize the significance of the entire story. There are climaxes of many different kinds, and a full discussion of them belongs in the chapters on the novel and the drama. Sometimes we regard the turning point as the climax, in novel or drama; sometimes, as especially in the short story or in a brief narrative poem, or a one-act play, it coincides with the catastrophe, and comes at the very end. But wherever it occurs, it gathers up into itself the whole imaginative meaning of the narrative, it calls upon all the powers of vision and interpretation that both author and reader may have, and it satisfies the sense of form and gratifies the desire for structural perfection. A story with a weak climax or with none at all is an intense disappointment, and in that disappointment may be lost all the reader's imaginative realization of the experience

of the writer. So, whether it is the first frustration of the ambitious plans of Macbeth in the escape of Fleance, or the first breaking down of the bars of pride and prejudice in Darcy and Elizabeth, whether it is the surprise at the end of a story by O. Henry or the quiet culmination of emotional forces at the close of one by Katherine Mansfield, the climax is a significant and important element in the construction of narrative writing.

In order, then, that the writer may convey to the reader the value of his experiences, he must put his visions and interpretations into a form which shall be suitable for their expression and which shall by its very structure influence the imagination and satisfy the desire for order and architectural beauty. And if he sees clearly, and presents forcefully, and creates with skill, and interprets with wisdom, and if he then builds suitably and solidly and beautifully, he has all the material of his experience ready to put into words which are the ultimate means of transmitting to his readers what he has seen and thought and felt and desired.

CHAPTER VIII

IMAGINATIVE EXPRESSION

LUDWIG LEWISOHN, writing on "Literature and Life," having said that the function of literature is the enlargement and clarification of men's experience, continues, "Its form, its varied beauty, contributes to the same end because it springs from the same source. For substance and form are in all vital work born together. Rhythmic and verbal symbols—however worthy of study for their own sake—are to this fundamental view but the voice of that creative personality who speaks of his experience to us in tones which the impact of that experience upon him has itself brought forth. Art is one. The music of a poem is of the very stuff of its meaning; the structure of a play the very rhythm of life here symbolized and set down. There is in art, as in any form of life, no outer or inner, neither kernel nor husk but an infinite complexity moulded into dissoluble oneness."¹

As we have been endeavoring to resolve that oneness into its elements and study the various values that literature possesses for us, we have discovered exactly this amazing interrelation between them. The content values are so interwoven that it is difficult to speak of one without implying or suggesting the others; and all of them in turn are inseparable, in the last analysis, from the values of form. Yet each one of these elements is worthy of study for its own sake. Not the least fascinating in

¹ *A Modern Book of Criticism*, edited by Ludwig Lewisohn (Boni & Liveright, 1919), pp. 183-184.

itself is style or the imaginative expression of experience. It is the final activity of the writer. Having chosen an experience of value and selected from it the significant details, having interpreted it and shaped it into an artistic whole, he then puts it into words. That these words shall be the right words to convey the value of his experience is his aim and desire. These steps in the making of a novel or a poem may follow so quickly one upon the other that substance and form will seem to be born together. But we know that this is only a figure of speech. Substance and form are indeed born out of the same experience, and therefore, when that experience has been put into words, they will seem, "in all vital work," to be absolutely one. But as a matter of fact, in the most vital work, the artistic product is the result of a combination of the "poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling," and the "infinite capacity for taking pains" to be sure that the frenzy has been given adequate expression. Poetry, said Wordsworth, is the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling," but, he adds later, "it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity." A very natural question often arises in the minds and to the lips of students of literature: was the writer consciously striving for the effects which he produces through his words? The necessary answer, "Yes," sometimes shatters for a time the youthful illusion that, like Topsy, a poem just grewed, that poetry, like the poet was born and not made. Perhaps this is a natural illusion. Yet why should we demand from literature greater spontaneity than from the other arts? We do not expect a statue, a painting, or a sonata to spring full formed from the chisel or the brush or the pen of the artist. The inevitable second question, to what extent the writer consciously strove for his effects, is more difficult to answer, and cannot be answered in

any form that will be universally true. Some writers do their striving in their heads before they write a word, and their manuscripts are "fair copies." Jonson lamented that Shakespeare "never blotted out a line"; how much he blotted out in his mind we shall never know. But we can point to many writers who did their striving upon paper. We can see Keats trying two, three, four,—perhaps even ten times, before he gets the right word or phrase or line in *The Eve of St. Agnes*; we can follow the revisions of early poems in the successive editions of the work of Tennyson or Coleridge; we can watch, on the pages of Shelley's notebook, a mere metrical scheme of meaningless syllables evolve into the "spontaneous" lyric, *O World, O Life, O Time*. We can recall Horace's advice to delay and polish. We can point to

Old Virgil who would write ten lines, they say,
At dawn, and lavish all the golden day
To make them wealthier in his readers' eyes; *

to Thackeray, who also lavished all the day on a paragraph in one of his novels; to Conrad, who would use two closely written sheets of typewriter paper to construct a single sentence; to Flaubert and his search for *le mot juste*. A sense of style was part of the natal endowment of these men, to be sure; no genius was ever made by the mere process of taking pains. But there was also in them a willingness to labor in order to perfect. And great was their reward: they are among the immortals.

The writer, then, must plan to convey to his readers by means of words the values of his experiences and his combinations and interpretations of them. He will be concerned chiefly with the intellectual and emotional values in this connection, for if he makes his meaning

*Tennyson, *Poets and their Bibliographies*.

clear to the minds of his readers and if he moves them to feelings commensurate with his own, he will be fairly sure to accomplish what ethical purpose he may have.

Among those qualities of style which aid in conveying the intellectual value or the significance of the thought of the writer, are chiefly clarity, simplicity, conciseness, and precision.

Clarity of thought, as we have already seen, is highly important in making literature valuable; hardly less so is clarity of expression. It is closely related to all the other virtues of style. It has often been said that a person who thinks clearly can express himself clearly. This is not entirely true. As we saw in an earlier chapter, there are many ways in which an idea that is perfectly clear to the writer may be obscured in the process of putting it into words. Least pardonable are the fads and mannerisms and poses into which third and fourth rate writers so easily fall. The reader who recognizes the presence of such superficialities in style will distrust—and rightly—the content behind it. The writer is not speaking “in tones which the impact of that experience upon him has itself brought forth.” A young man was once overheard in a railroad station reading to his companion a poem of his own composition. It was an amazing poem, too, all about poets and mushrooms. At the end of the second stanza, his companion said, in puzzled tones, “It’s very nice, but I don’t quite understand it.” “Why, you see,” he explained, “I’m comparing the poets to a field of mushrooms. Rather good idea, I think.” And his reply was in the tone of one flattered and pleased at being thought obscure. Obscurity of this kind, sprung from the desire of being different, bespeaks such a poverty of intellectual value behind the expression that we care little whether

the idea is conveyed to us or not. We properly and profitably ignore it.

But sometimes a good writer, with a thought of real value, expresses himself obscurely. It may be because he fails to exemplify in his style the other qualities,—simplicity, conciseness, and precision. Or, on the other hand, he may have made vices out of some of these virtues, and so simplified and reduced his words to a minimum that they are not sufficient to convey adequately and directly his meaning.

Simplicity, for instance, should not be sacrificed if the main object of the writer is to make his thought clear. But neither should it be overdone. Wordsworth is sometimes over simple, as in *The Idiot Boy*. And in this poem he fails almost completely to transmit his idea to the reader. The reason for this is not that his words are not clear but that he does not arouse the desired emotion. Here the interrelation of values is in evidence. We can, if we try, understand what Wordsworth meant in this poem, but our comprehension is hindered because we are unsympathetic. The excess of simplicity is as much of an obstacle as actual obscurity of style.

On the other hand, if he wishes to make sure that the reader will see the value of his thought, no writer should bury that thought under a mass of imagery, allusion, or melody. The thought of Shelley and Swinburne is often difficult to reach because the attention is focussed on the images or the music. Gray and Milton are sometimes hard to understand because of the wealth of allusion in the *Odes* or in *Paradise Lost*. To some extent it is unjust to blame Milton or Gray for this obscurity, because to them their allusions were quite lucid. The modern reader, however, less thoroughly trained, if at all, in the classics and in the Scriptures, finds notes and books of reference a

necessary adjunct to the poems. It must be understood that we are speaking here solely from the point of view of the success of the writer in conveying the intellectual value of his material; the stimulus to the imagination and the emotional significance that come from the use of imagery, allusion, and melody are another matter. They, of course, may be just as important to the reader as comprehension of the thought. Shelley, Milton, Swinburne, and Gray have put into their poetry qualities of style that may well compensate for any lack of clarity of expression,—qualities too that make us find it worth our while to put forth an effort to comprehend that we may enrich ourselves from the hidden stores of intellectual treasures.

True simplicity, however, not only conveys the writer's thought, but also moves the reader. This point has already been discussed in connection with emotional sincerity. Wordsworth's best work, like *Michael*, *Tintern Abbey*, some of the Lucy poems, and many of the sonnets, is not only supremely lucid in expression but strongly moving because of its simplicity. The style of many of the greatest literary artists,—the chroniclers of the Bible, Shakespeare, Swift, Wordsworth—is exquisitely and movingly clear and simple. Among modern writers, the man who has achieved the finest effects through simplicity is Robert Frost. And his, like that of the great men who preceded him, is a natural not a studied simplicity.

The way a crow
Threw down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree

Has given my heart
A change of mood

And saved some part
Of a day I had rued.³

This little poem succeeds, without stylistic ornaments or markedly beautiful diction, in conveying thought and feeling. It is a single sentence in verse form, with familiar words, largely monosyllables, put together in the natural order. Its very simplicity not only conveys the idea but has a power over our feelings and imaginations.

Conciseness also may be carried to such extremes that the result is obscurity rather than clarity. Browning's habits of omitting important connecting words and of plunging the reader into the midst of a story without adequate explanation often make him hard reading as does Meredith's failure to develop an idea fully. Chesterton's experiment in "Browningese" is scarcely a caricature of the dramatic monologue as Browning used it. He described, as the poet would, a fight in which one man called the other a liar and was kicked downstairs.⁴ The description was very brief:

What then? 'You lie!' And doormat belowstairs
Takes bump from back.

But conciseness, properly used, makes for clarity and power. It is seen at its best in the *Essays* of Francis Bacon, of whom Ben Jonson said that he spoke so neatly and so "pressly" that his hearer could not cough or look aside without loss. It demands mental concentration to read Bacon, but except for the necessity of finding out the meaning of some of the unfamiliar Elizabethan words, it does not demand intellectual effort to get at the thought through the expression. There are no false starts; the idea is presented clearly and directly, stripped of the

³ From *New Hampshire* (Holt, 1923).

⁴ Chesterton, Gilbert K., *Robert Browning* (Macmillan, 1904), p. 157.

mass of verbiage in which so many writers clothe their thoughts, muscular and naked. The lamp of intellectual value is not hidden under a bushel, but is put on the stand where all may see it.

Precision of diction perhaps never becomes a vice, except when it is carried to the pedantic extreme of using words so rare that they are unintelligible to the average reader. Such preciousness, however, is usually the result of a desire to appear uniquely learned rather than an effort after precision. The value of the precise word in producing clarity can hardly be too strongly emphasized. Every writer should be equipped with a book of synonyms, whether on his desk or in his head. Sentimental Tommy lost the prize, to be sure, by searching for the exact word. But that unwillingness to be content with a substitute is characteristic of the best writers. What was it that made Keats rewrite the line from *The Eve of St. Agnes*,

Shut like a missal where swart Paynims pray,
and make it

Clasped like a missal where swart Paynims pray?

The narrower word *clasped* fitted more exactly his meaning and conveys it far better than the word *shut*. No writer should employ vague words in which the mind of the reader slips around and finds no firm foothold of precise significance. Someone called the Latin word *res* a blank check into which can be written whatever value you please. A test of good translation is the ability to write the correct value. Indeed careful translation from a foreign language is excellent training in precision. We have in English many verbal blank checks that must be used with the utmost care. Swift is one of the most precise of prose writers. Try substituting other words--

words that seem to be synonymous—for those that he has chosen, and it will at once be obvious that no substitution is possible without marring the sense as well as the beauty of his sentences.

Whether or not the style of an author is lucid, it may serve to arouse emotion and convey the feeling of the writer. This it does through influencing the imagination of the reader to such an extent that he will realize the emotional experience of the writer. The necessity of thus influencing the reader calls into play all the imaginative powers of the writer. As he has chosen a structure suitable to his meaning and feeling, so he will choose words that fit. He will join his words into melodious periods that will give pleasure in themselves, and he will select diction that in itself is beautiful. It will be interesting and profitable, therefore, to study the stylistic devices by which the author stirs the imagination, moves the feelings, and impresses his meaning and purpose.

When we open a book to read it, our first experience is a visual perception of the page and the words upon it. Although we do not always realize it or put it into words, this initial sensory experience has often a strong effect upon our mood or attitude and upon our imagination. Good printing and spacing, for instance, please the eye and put the reader into a receptive mood, a mood in which he is ready to be pleased by the content and form of what is printed on the page as well as by its appearance. Every teacher knows that he must make an effort to avoid an unfavorable pre-judgment of an untidy and illegible examination paper. And yet an unattractive book page may have a different effect if the difficulty of reading it is associated with a quaintness that stimulates the imagination. No matter how small, faded, or crowded the type of an old book may be, nor how illegible a mediæval

manuscript, we may find pleasure in the very adventure of deciphering it or in the realization of its age, its history, and its associations. If so, we shall be put into a very different attitude toward the contents of the book from that which we should have toward a modern volume that had been poorly and carelessly printed. Fads and mannerisms in typography, punctuation, and arrangement frequently affect our attitude unpleasantly. E. E. Cummings' neglect of marks of punctuation and the peculiar alignment of his verses make the conservative, at any rate, ready to renounce him and all his works. Take this, for example:

O sweet spontaneous
earth how often have
the
doting

 fingers of
prurient philosophers pinched
and
poked

thee
, has the naughty thumb
of science prodded
thy

beauty .⁵

Or, of course, the paragraphing and punctuation may be spurs to the imagination. Modern editions of the Bible, even when they use no translation more recent than the American Revision, succeed, by printing the text as continuous, without any division into verses, in stimulating a new receptivity, which welcomes the meaning and the beauty of the Scriptures. Zona Gale, in an article on the

⁵ From "La Guerre," *Tulips and Chimneys* (Seltzer, 1923), p. 74. Used by permission of A. and C. Boni.

modern novel,⁶ recognizes the effect which the appearance of the printed page may have upon the imagination of the reader. She pleads for a rearrangement of dialogue out of the old form, which allots a separate paragraph to every speech and every bit of narrative within the conversation, into solid paragraphs, "a smooth integration of talk within narrative," combining "the two in a flow, a compactness, a unity which the broken jarred ragged sentences of the former cannot achieve." "The obvious advantage," she continues later, "is that thus, when one has something of dramatic or illuminative or anticipatory moment to say, there is ready to one's hand a dramatic way of presentation, namely, by setting off every such sentence in a line by itself. But if for pages every 'yes' and 'no' and 'perhaps' has been thus set off, no such means of enhancement is possible. And, of course, there are times when a 'yes' or a 'no' holds the most dramatic implication; and then the line becomes an explicative thing in itself."

The attitude of the reader is influenced by the presence of verse or prose in the book which he holds in his hand. His expectations of content and style will not be the same for both. We may test this truth by reading some unfamiliar lines of poetry put into prose form. In the following, for instance, if we read it as prose, we shall find words that surprise and displease us; if we read it in its proper form, blank verse, *thee* and *betwixt* will seem perfectly natural. These are the closing lines of Coleridge's *Frost at Midnight*:

Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee, whether the summer clothe the general earth with greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch of mossy

⁶"Note to Novel Readers," *Saturday Review of Literature*, Dec. 18, 1928

apple-tree, while the nigh thatch smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall heard only in the trances of the blast, or if the secret ministry of frost shall hang them up in silent icicles, quietly shining to the quiet moon.

But these are all matters, though controlled by the writer, of typesetting and structure, rather than of style or imaginative expression. Far more than the printer, the author, by the words which he chooses and the way in which he combines those words, casts a spell over the imaginations of his readers. In weaving such spells, the artist is depending on the fact that the reader will usually make a physical response to any image that he creates. According to the supporters of the theory of empathy, this is a muscular reaction, a motor set, in which the muscles reproduce or tend to reproduce the movement expressed or suggested. "It will be recalled," says Langfeld, "that two attitudes may be assumed toward the outstretched hand of a statue: either one of grasping the hand, or of feeling the 'outstretching' of the hand. It is through this latter attitude, which gives us the feeling of the tension and the weight of the arm, the angle at which it is raised, and the bend at the elbow and wrist, that we can get the true æsthetic effect."⁷ The discussion of empathy has been confined largely to the field of the arts other than literature, but it is clear that the phenomenon occurs in the case of the reader of prose and poetry as well as in that of the beholder of pictures or statues or buildings. The extreme advocates of the theory would say that a sound or a sight is æsthetically enjoyed only because our muscles respond, though ever so slightly, to the rhythm or the curves or the lines. Our bodies have a tendency to sway with music, our hands to follow the curves of a statue. It is from these balanced and harmonious move-

⁷ Langfeld, H. S., *The Æsthetic Attitude*, p. 113.

ments, overt or not, that our æsthetic pleasure comes. If this be true, then the pleasure to be found in every image created by words is the result of the process of empathizing. Even those images which we think please because they remind us of some pleasant experience, will be found to please because in that original pleasant experience we empathized in some object. Yet for practical purposes the theory of empathy need not be pressed too far. Often we are not conscious of any motor set, but seem to find pleasure in an image merely because it delights the eye or the ear. And during the course of this discussion, although evidently it may be possible to press every response back to the motor set, that attempt will not always be made. We are concerned here with the way in which the artist in words appeals to the mind and the emotions of the reader, and often that appeal seems to come directly through one or other of the senses without causing any motor response.

It is probable, however, that this process of empathizing lies at the basis of our pain or pleasure at the mere sound of words, singly or in combination. When we read, especially when we read poetry, we may have not only a visual perception of the words before us but also auditory and articulatory images. This is true all the more if we are being read to. Although there may be little indication of it in the movements of the muscles, we are usually pronouncing the words as we see or hear them. Consequently we feel disturbed if articulation is made difficult and we experience distinct pleasure if the movements of our vocal organs are smooth and easy. In thinking of or reading silently one of the familiar "tongue-twisters" like "Theophilus Thistle," we shall find ourselves stumbling as if we were actually trying to enunciate it. And we not only pronounce the words on the page before us, we hear

them. Again we are pleased if the words themselves are musical and if the sounds flow smoothly into one another. This smoothness of sound translates itself into smoothness of motion, conscious or unconscious. Smoothness, melody, rhythm, the skillful use of alliteration and assonance,—all these create a pleasure that is delight in the mere sound and articulation of the words, apart from any meaning that they have. It is a delight akin to that we feel in music or in the sound of a foreign language.

These effects are illustrated most easily in poetry, in which sound seems to play so much larger a part than in prose. But prose also may produce that sensuous delight in its harmonies and rhythms. This passage from Ruskin, for instance, can give pleasure by its sound alone. To enjoy it, as the poet in *Patience* said, it is not necessary to think of anything at all.

On the opposite side of the valley, walled all along as it was by grey cliffs of limestone, there was a hawk sailing slowly off their brow, touching them nearly with his wings, and with the shadows of the pines flickering upon his plumage from above; but with a fall of a hundred fathoms under his breast, and the curling pools of the green river gliding and glittering dizzily beneath him, their foam globes moving with him as he flew.*

Swinburne and Shelley both depend for their appeal very largely upon the effects of their harmonies and rhythms. In Swinburne's *A Swimmer's Dream*, one can lose himself on the stream of sound and forget the thought entirely, so potent is the spell of the alliteration and assonance, of the swinging movement of the lines, which the poet can make either swift or slow, and of the smoothness of the sounds, which seem to melt into one another.

* From "The Lamp of Memory," in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*.

Dawn is dim on the dark soft water,
 Soft and passionate, dark and sweet.
 Love's own self was the deep sea's daughter,
 Fair and flawless from face to feet,
 Hailed of all when the world was golden,
 Loved of lovers whose names beholden
 Thrill men's eyes as with light of olden
 Days more glad than their flight was fleet.

Swinburne can even bewitch one into enjoyment of his *Nepheidia*, which he wrote as a burlesque upon himself, and in which there is no meaning. More subtle than Swinburne is Shelley, with his exquisite interweaving of alliteration, and his constantly varying harmonies and rhythms. *The Cloud* is one of the most familiar illustrations.

I bring fresh showers for the thirsting flowers,
 From the seas and the streams;
 I bear light shade for the leaves when laid
 In their noonday dreams.
 From my wings are shaken the dews that waken
 The sweet buds every one,
 When rocked to rest on their mother's breast,
 As she dances about the sun.

And perhaps there is no poet who has managed assonance, or repetition of sound, so skillfully as has Poe in the following lines from *For Annie*:

My tantalized spirit
 Here blandly reposes,
 Forgetting, or never
 Regretting, its roses—
 Its old agitations
 Of myrtles and roses:

For now, while so quietly
 Lying, it fancies
 A holier odor
 About it, of pansies—
 A rosemary odor,
 Commingled with pansies—

With rue and the beautiful
Puritan pansies.

Here is poetry that sings itself into the mind and soul like music. We may be haunted and obsessed by its melody as by a tune, and, if we read much of it, we shall find our thoughts moving in time with its rhythms. I have repeated to myself for days, quite without my own volition, the first line of Blake's *Book of Thel*:

The daughters of the Seraphim led round their sunny flocks.

No artist in words, however, whether he is using verse or prose, stops short with the pure auditory image. Often he gives to that auditory image the power of suggesting to the imagination of the reader associated images that will influence his thought and feeling and so help him to understand and share in the pleasurable experience of the writer. Again there will usually be the motor response; we shall empathize, or "feel in" the object suggested. The degree to which the reader does enter into the experience of the writer and empathize in the object will vary markedly with different individuals. It will depend upon his experience, the strength of his own power of imagination, and the nature of his imagery. Yet there are few readers who, if they will read and listen at the same time, will fail to feel the rise and fall of a ship in the rhythm of Mr. Masfield's *Sea-Fever*.

I must down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's
shaking,
And a grey mist on the sea's face and a grey dawn breaking.

But it will be most of all the man who has sailed a boat who will feel, at the suggestion of the abrupt rhythm

of the third line, the jerk of the wheel under his hand and the shaking of the sail. The use of rhythm in Mr. de la Mare's *The Listeners* is more subtle, with the changes from the rapid, almost panic-stricken knocking on the door to the slow quiet of the listening. The very irregularity of the rhythm suggests something weird and otherworldly. The motor response here may not be very strong, except to those whose kinæsthetic imagery is highly developed. Yet even for those who cannot identify in themselves any empathic response, the strange rhythm suggests auditory images that create an atmosphere of the supernatural and induce a mood of wonder and dread. It represents the unearthly, hurried knocking and the eerie suspense of all sound. Prose too may contain rhythms that are suggestive, as is shown by the famous sentence from Milton's *Areopagitica*, which moves slowly and without effort at the beginning and then at the close produces that feeling of strain which the runners in a race must experience: "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat."

In poetry, the rhythm of a passage is determined partly by the meter and the modifications which the poet makes in his chosen metrical form. Such modifications are to be found in *The Listeners*, modifications so numerous that the poem is a very difficult one to scan. The poet who makes changes in the basic meter of his poem, substituting one kind of foot for another, does so sometimes for the sake of variety, as was shown in the last chapter, and sometimes for the purpose of suggesting an image to the reader. So Milton, describing Satan entering a void in his journey up through Chaos, writes,

Fluttering his pennons vain, plumb-down he drops,
where the dactyl and the spondee substituted for the first and fourth iambuses, are highly suggestive of the two motions described. Similarly Pope, usually so faithful in his use of the regular iambic pentameter, employs spondees to suggest weight and effort and a trochee to give the impression of light, swift movement, in these lines from *An Essay on Criticism*:

When Ajax strives some rock's *vast weight* to throw,
The line, *too*, labours, and the words *move slow*:
Not so when swift Camilla scours the plain,
Flies o'er th'unbending corn, and skims along the main.

In both of these examples, it is clear that the images suggested by the changes in metrical form are chiefly kinæsthetic. The effects here are excellent illustrations of empathy. The hand may naturally respond to the fluttering motion of Satan's wings; we may put our shoulders to the rock with Ajax. A motor set is frequently the direct result, not only of metrical changes but also of fundamental metrical form. There are certain meters, for instance, which suggest the galloping of horses. Joaquin Miller once asked Browning if he might borrow the measure of his *How They Brought the Good News* for a poem describing a prairie fire driving a herd of buffalo over the plains into the river. "Why," said Browning, "not borrow from Virgil as I did?"⁹ He was undoubtedly thinking of the line,

Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum.¹⁰

These Latin dactyls and the anapæsts of Browning and

⁹ This anecdote is told in a note by Joaquin Miller on *Kit Carson's Ride*. See *Joaquin Miller's Poems* (6 vols., San Francisco, the Whitcher and Ray Co., 1915), Vol. II, p. 182.

¹⁰ *Æneid* 8. 596.

the iambuses of Byron's *Mazeppa* all give the reader the exhilaration that comes from breath-taking speed. He is definitely "feeling in" the movement of horse and rider.

Not merely the meter but also the stanzaic form of a poem may be suggestive of images. Some of the curious imaginations of the seventeenth century chose to put their poems about altars or angels' wings into such a form that the outline of the printed text would be that of the object that was being described. Such extreme conceits had brief popularity. But other poets have constructed their stanzas of long or short lines or a combination of them in order to suggest images. In the following stanza from *A Pindaric Ode*, Ben Jonson has allotted the longest lines to the three hundred year old oak, the shortest to the lily of a day:

It is not growing like a tree
In bulk, doth make men better be;
Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,
To fall a log at last, dry, bald, and sear:
 A lily of a day
 Is fairer far, in May;
Although it fall and die that night,
It was the plant and flower of light.
In small proportions we just beauties see,
And in short measures life may perfect be.

So Herrick, in *To Daffodils*, and Meredith, in *Dirge in Woods*, choose monometers to suggest the brevity of life.

One of the most exquisite examples of the suggestion of imagery by means of stanzaic form is to be found in Shelley's *Skylark*. The most striking image in the whole poem is that of the "flood of rapture," which is the skylark's song. The poet repeats it again and again, having presented it first in the initial stanza. Heaven is overflowed with moonlight or with rain; music overflows the

bower of the highborn maiden. And so the verse overflows its bounds. Each stanza is composed of five lines: the first four are short and regular and alternately rhymed; the fifth is twice as long as any of the others. This long fifth line may suggest the soaring of the bird or the sustained quality of its song. Especially does it give the effect of a swift cascade of sound overflowing the rim of the quatrain. The "profuse strains of unpremeditated art" cannot be confined within narrow limits; they rush swiftly over into the wider space, often with no pause indicated by punctuation or possible in the reading. A few stanzas will illustrate:

Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!
Bird thou never wert,
That from Heaven, or near it,
Pourest thy full heart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

All the earth and air
With thy voice is loud,
As when Night is bare
From one lonely cloud
The moon rains out her beams, and Heaven is overflowed.

Sound of vernal showers
On the twinkling grass,
Rain-awakened flowers,
All that ever was
Joyous and clear and fresh, thy music doth surpass:

Teach us, Sprite or Bird,
What sweet thoughts are thine:
I have never heard
Praise of love or wine
That panted forth a flood of rapture so divine.

Prose does not share meter with poetry as it does rhythm. But good prose and poetry alike may suggest images by the sound of individual words. This method of

image-making is illustrated in some of the passages already quoted. Milton's effect is secured not only by the movement of the line but also by the syllabic lightness of the word *fluttering* and the dull heaviness of *plumb-down*. When the word is one which means a sound and represents that same sound, as in Milton's

Brush'd with the hiss of rustling wings,²²

the phenomenon, which we call onomatopœia, is familiar and obvious. But in this line, the sound image is helped by another word, *brush'd*, which is not itself a sound word. So, in the familiar lines from Tennyson's *Princess*,

The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
The murmuring of innumerable bees,

there are only two words which illustrate onomatopœia in the narrower sense. But all the liquids and voiced sibilants in the two lines aid in the formation of the sound image. And when sound is thus added to sound, the cumulative effect is often very striking. Nor are auditory images the only ones that may be suggested by the sound of the words. In the following passage, which describes the poor mower, we may see and feel movement, we may be aware of pressure, we may hear sounds. These images, visual, kinæsthetic, tactual, and auditory, are created partly by the meanings of the words, to be sure, but also partly by the sharp, hard sounds.

He leaves great crescents of grass uncut. He digs the point of the scythe hard into the ground with a jerk. He loosens the handles and even the fastening of the blade. He twists the blade with his blunders, he blunts the blade, he chips it, dulls it, or breaks it clean off at the tip. If any one is standing by he cuts him in the ankle. He sweeps up into the air wildly, with nothing to resist his

²² *Paradise Lost*, Book I, l. 768.

stroke. He drags up earth with the grass, which is like making the meadow bleed.²²

Very skillful is the artist in using this device, and many examples might be cited, especially from poetry. "Numb were the beadsman's fingers," wrote Keats in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, and the very bluntness of the word transmits the sensation to our own fingers. The clatter of the horse's hoofs is heard in the sharp consonants of the line from Vergil quoted on a previous page. Images of sight, of sound, and of motion are suggested by the words in these lines from Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*, although actually there are no sight words:

Laughed every goblin
When they spied her peeping:
Came towards her hobbling,
Flying, running, leaping,
Puffing and blowing,
Chuckling, clapping, crowing,
Clucking and gobbling,
Mopping and mowing.

And Ruskin's prose is full of the same effects:

We find ourselves in a paved alley, some seven feet wide where it is widest, full of people, and resonant with cries of itinerant salesmen,—a shriek in their beginning, and dying away into a kind of brazen ringing, all the worse for its confinement between the high houses of the passage along which we have to make our way. Over-head, an inextricable confusion of rugged shutters, and iron balconies and chimney flues.²³

In these illustrations, the sound of the words is, in almost every case, truly representative of the image which the writer wished to create. The sound of *numb* is a per-

²² Belloc, Hilaire, "The Mowing of a Field," in *Hills and the Sea*, 2nd edition (London, Methuen and Co., [1906]), p. 208.

²³ *The Stones of Venice*, Vol. II, Chapter 4.

fect reproduction of the feeling of numbness; the word *hobbling* hobbles in sound; *rugged shutters* sounds broken and rough; and the very syllables of *inextricable confusion* seem inextricably confused. Often, however, the sound of words serves not to represent but to suggest an image. Such is the effect of the repeated long vowels in Dryden's picture of the sleeping city:

The diligence of trades and noiseful gain,
And luxury, more late, asleep were laid:
All was the Night's, and in her silent reign
No sound the rest of nature did invade.¹⁴

Poe recognized and made use of the suggestive power of sound in *The Bells*. The picture of a "discouraging day" is drawn in the flat, unpleasant sounds of the following:

The year was dying of rheumy age. On the trees still hung a few dank, blotched leaves while the sodden ground plashed under foot and a leaden mist of rain covered everything.¹⁵

Four stanzas from Shelley's *Sensitive Plant*, two from the description of the garden in its prime and two from the picture of it in its desolation, show with what genius Shelley chose the vowels and consonants that made up his words to aid the meaning of those words in presenting an image. Here the total picture is compounded of appeals to sight, smell, and touch, and there is suggested also a motor response. The soft liquids and the round and delicate vowels present a quiet, fragile, and ordered beauty, more exquisite than any picture drawn merely by the meanings of the words.

And the wand-like lily, which lifted up,
As a Mænad, its moonlight-colored cup,

¹⁴ *Annus Mirabilis*, Stanza 216.

¹⁵ Scoville, Samuel, Jr., "Dragon's Blood," *Yale Review*, April, 1920.

Till the fiery star, which is its eye,
Gazed through clear dew on the tender sky;

And the jessamine faint, and the sweet tube-rose,
The sweetest flower for scent that blows;
And all rare blossoms from every clime
Grew in that garden in perfect prime.

In two stanzas from the last part of the poem, this lovely music gives place to sharp hard consonants and flat vowels, which make us shrink back from the sight and the touch and the smell of that ruined garden.

Between the time of the wind and the snow
All loathliest weeds began to grow,
Whose coarse leaves were splashed with many a speck,
Like the water-snake's belly and the toad's back.

And thistles, and nettles, and darnels rank,
And the dock, and henbane, and hemlock dank,
Stretched out its long and hollow shank,
And stifled the air till the dead wind stank.

The image-making power of language, however, is not confined to its sound; the meanings of words are, if they are well chosen, of even greater effect. Max Eastman, in *The Enjoyment of Poetry*, makes the distinction between names practical and names poetic. "Here is so simple and commonly regarded an object as water, for instance," he says. "The scientific have named it 'H₂O.' The poetic name it 'wet'—not to say 'babbling,' 'wild,' and so forth."¹⁶ That is the "poetic" writer, or, we might say, in general, the literary or artistic writer, conveys to the reader an image of water, he does not merely analyze it into its constituent parts. He may do this very simply, appealing directly to one of the senses, by the use of the adjective *wet*, from which we get a distinct tactual image. Or he may use the word *babbling*, thus appealing to our

ears and at the same time comparing the sound made by the water to certain sounds made by the human voice in order that we may form a more exact auditory image. The word *babbling* is also suggestive as well as descriptive, for with it are associated ideas and feelings, such as simplicity and happiness, for example. And, if babbling waters are included in the reader's personal experience, he will probably visualize a scene of which the central feature will be a brook flowing down a hill-side over a stony bed. Similarly the word *wild* is both descriptive and suggestive, reminding us that water may be roused to a fury like that of a live creature, and creating for us an image perhaps of a river in flood, perhaps of the ocean in a storm. So that word *water*, which to the mere chemist is nothing but H_2O , may, when wrought upon by the artistic imagination and poetically named, create for the reader images of wonder and beauty and power. There are many hundreds of things that waters may mean, according to the experience and imagination of the artist and the experience and imagination of the reader. They may be the waters of Wordsworth's "steady lake" ¹⁷—

Waters on a starry night
Are beautiful and fair.¹⁸

They may be Keats'

moving waters at their priest-like task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores.¹⁹

They may be the waters of Æschylus' sea, with its "innumerable laughter," ²⁰ or of Dickens' Thames,—"the

¹⁷ *Prelude*, Book V, l. 388.

¹⁸ *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*.

¹⁹ *Sonnet: Bright Star*.

²⁰ *Prometheus Bound*, ll. 89-90.

filthy water”²¹—or of any of the myriad oceans and rivers and lakes that have been seen with the eye of imagination.

This, as has been suggested in a previous chapter, is the process of putting into words the artist’s own interpretation of his experience. It deserves more study here from the point of view of the words themselves, and what those words can do for the reader. Again it must be emphasized that they will do for different readers different things according to their experience and the nature of their imagery as well as the strength of their ability to “think of absent things as if they were present.” The word *locomotive* will mean little to one of the mountain whites of Kentucky who has never seen one. If he gets an image at all, it will probably be an erroneous one. A man who has seen locomotives may visualize an engine standing on a track, or hear it puff and whistle, or feel it moving at the rate of sixty miles an hour, according as his imagery is chiefly visual, auditory, or kinæsthetic. The man with strong power of visualization will see the rich, patterned color of Keats’ “tiger-moth’s deep-damask’d wings”; he whose sense of touch is keen may feel rich damask. But recognizing these limitations and variations among readers, we may study the possibilities which the words used by an artist have for image-making, and the methods he employs to make those images.

There are many words that are simply descriptive in nature,—words of color, shape, sound, motion, feeling. Much effective narrative and description has been written in language made up of simple, specific nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. About Dickens’ prose, for example, there is little subtlety or allusiveness or figurative

²¹ *Our Mutual Friend*, Chapter 1.

quality; his pictures, static or moving, are presented directly to the reader. Their vividness is due to the specific quality of the words which he chooses.

Mr. Winkle, stooping forward, with his body half doubled up, was being assisted over the ice by Mr. Weller, in a very singular and un-swan-like manner, when Mr. Pickwick most innocently shouted from the opposite bank—

“Sam!”

“Sir?” said Mr. Weller.

“Here. I want you.”

“Let go, sir,” said Sam. “Don’t you hear the governor a callin’? Let go, sir.”

With a violent effort, Mr. Weller disengaged himself from the grasp of the agonized Pickwickian; and, in so doing, administered a considerable impetus to the unhappy Mr. Winkle. With an accuracy which no degree of dexterity or practice could have insured, that unfortunate gentleman bore swiftly down into the centre of the reel, at the very moment when Mr. Bob Sawyer was performing a flourish of unparalleled beauty. Mr. Winkle struck wildly against him, and with a loud crash they both fell heavily down. Mr. Pickwick ran to the spot. Bob Sawyer had risen to his feet, but Mr. Winkle was far too wise to do anything of the kind in skates. He was seated on the ice, making spasmodic efforts to smile; but anguish was depicted on every lineament of his countenance.²²

The early poetry of Keats, especially *Endymion*, is full of descriptive diction of this kind. Direct appeals to the senses crowd upon each other, sometimes bewildering in their profusion. If the reader is asked to make too many images in quick succession, his power of image-making grows weary; he is, as it were, watching a cinematograph run at double speed. The good descriptive artist avoids the danger of fatiguing his reader’s senses by the wise choice of detail and the sparing use of descriptive words to secure the desired effect. In the following lines, Mr.

²² *Pickwick Papers*, Chapter 29.

Gibson succeeds in creating an image full of vivid humor partly by the use of a few definite picture-making words:

He'd never dream they could be laughing at
A butler.

"Twould be good to see the fat
Old peach-cheek in his solemn black and starch
Parading in his pompous parlour-march
Across that field of laughing daffodils."²²

Words, however, are not all so simple and direct in their operation as these. Many of them produce an image through the process of reminding the reader of some experience that he has had, in person or through books. The emotional power of allusion or suggestion is obvious, and has already been discussed somewhat in a previous chapter. We saw how greatly the emotional effect of a poem like Lang's *Scythe Song* or Quiller-Couch's *Saturn* could be enhanced by the personal associations which a reader might have with the scene or the situation portrayed. A single word or phrase, through allusion or suggestion, may have the power to call up associated images that will strengthen the emotional appeal of the original image and clarify its meaning.

The writer whose mind is stored with the wealth of history and literature, will be reminded by many of his experiences of portions of that wealth. And into the fabric of his writing he will weave many an allusion to those precious things in his reading. The full value of such allusions unfortunately may be lost upon those whose reading does not include the same riches. Yet, even when the reader has little clue to the significance of the detail that has been woven into the design, even when the intellectual value is hidden, there is enough of suggestive beauty to justify the pattern. Although the symbolism

²² Gibson, W. W., "Daffodils" (in *Liveliness*, Macmillan, 1917).

of the birds and serpents and lotus-leaves in a Persian prayer rug may be unknown, the beholder will get from its design some suggestion of the Orient. The reader will find romance in the very names in Mr. Masfield's *Cargoes*,—

Quinquireme of Nineveh from distant Ophir,
Rowing home to haven in sunny Palestine—

but if his experience holds nothing of Nineveh the Great and of the gold of Ophir, he cannot respond to all the associations of those lines, his images will be less clear, his emotions less concrete. Milton's rich mind worked constantly with material associated with the actual stuff of his pictures. When he wanted to show the size of Satan's hosts, he called up to the imagination of his readers visions of the gods and the giants and the heroes of olden story:

And now his heart
Distends with pride, and, hardening in his strength,
Glories: for never, since created Man,
Met such embodied force as, named with these,
Could merit more than that small infantry
Warred on by cranes—though all the giant brood
Of Phlegra with the heroic race were joined
That fought at Thebes and Ilium, on each side
Mixed with auxiliar gods; and what resounds
In fable or romance of Uther's son,
Begirt with British and Armoric knights;
And all who since, baptized or infidel,
Jousted in Aspramont, or Montalban,
Damasco, or Marocco, or Trebisonde,
Or whom Biserta sent from Afric shore
When Charlemain with all his peerage fell
By Fontarabbia.*

Much of our older English prose is shot through and through with allusions to the Bible and with Biblical

* *Paradise Lost*, Book I, ll. 571-587.

phraseology. Bacon and Burke and Lamb, Carlyle and Ruskin and Arnold are richer in value for him who knows scriptural history and literature than for him who does not. The following sentences are all taken from the first four paragraphs of Lamb's essay, *The Two Races of Men*:

All the dwellers upon earth, "Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites," flock hither and do naturally fall in with one or other of these primary distinctions. . . . The latter are born degraded. "He shall serve his brethren." . . . What a careless, even deportment hath your borrower! what rosy gills! what a beautiful reliance on Providence doth he manifest—taking no more thought than lilies! . . . He is the true taxpayer who "calletth all the world up to be taxed." . . . In vain the victim, whom he delighteth to honour, struggles with destiny; he is in the net. Lend therefore cheerfully, O man ordained to lend—that thou lose not in the end, with thy worldly penny, the reversion promised. Combine not preposterously in thine own person the penalties of Lazarus and of Dives!

In *The Blessed Damozel*, Rossetti wrote,

Her voice was like the voice the stars
Had when they sang together.

Here is an allusion to the morning stars of the Book of Job, but how much more is contained in these lines than a mere allusion. As in the case of the passage from Milton quoted above, there is such a strong suggestion here of the quality which the poet wishes to make his reader imagine that we think less of the voice of the morning stars and more of the voice of the Blessed Damozel. Lamb, on the other hand, is more apt to make our minds travel away from the immediate image to the more remote one. We think of Solomon and the lilies of the field rather than of the flourishing appearance of the borrower. This is because the connection between the two is a lit-

tle forced, whimsically delightful, to be sure, but somewhat strained. Hence Milton and Rossetti succeed in evoking for us a clearer image than does Lamb. This does not mean that Lamb is making an artistic mistake; on the contrary, this side-tracking of his readers' minds is part of his whimsical purpose. But it does show that allusions might, in careless hands, defeat the purpose of the writer.

Words and phrases that, without being allusive, are highly suggestive of other images or experiences, although they are not liable to that error, demand equal skill. It is hard to believe that they are as consciously used as allusions; they seem to be the result of a more spontaneous overflow of feeling. How the artist has found the words that are so full of associated meanings, we do not know. Yet there they are, to help us to the full significance of the writer's thought and feeling. There they are for us to seek to understand, to marvel at, even to envy. Could we learn from the poets—the makers—the secret of such diction, the world should listen then—as we are listening now. We can only note them and try to interpret. There is suggested the whole emotion of utter hopelessness in the gesture described by Rossetti in *My Sister's Sleep*,—

And both my arms fell, and I said,
"God knows I knew that she was dead."

There is the illumination of the emotional significance of an entire passage that comes from the suggestive power of a single word. Wordsworth has made manifest the largesse of Nature in the simple verb *lay*:

A boy I loved the sun . . .
But for this cause, that I had seen him lay
His beauty on the morning hills.²⁸

²⁸ *The Prelude*, Book II, ll. 178, 183-184.

Carlyle has crowded a world of meaning into the adjective *thin* in the clause, "where in her door-sill the aged widow, knitting for a thin livelihood, sits to feel the afternoon sun." ²⁶ The mightiness of Marlowe's "mighty line" is often dependent upon the suggestions which he makes:

Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?

The average mind, quoting these lines from *Dr. Faustus*, too often substitutes *topmost* for *topless*; and straightway the supreme grandeur of Priam's city is gone.

It is an interesting fact that some of the most striking images in imaginative writing do not submit themselves to exact analysis. A simple illustration is to be found in the "topless towers" of Marlowe. We know that we get no picture of towers without tops; it is not the literal but the suggested or the figurative meaning that Marlowe wishes to convey. In *Lycidas*, Milton makes a startling image of the selfishness and gluttony of the clergy, —an image that it is impossible to resolve into any clear appeal to the senses:

Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold
A sheep-hook.

Of the same nature, but far less fine, is Blake's apostrophe *To the Evening Star*:

Speak silence with thy glimmering eyes.

And it gives promise of the Blake who later wrote in *The Mental Traveller*,

Catches his shrieks in cups of gold,

²⁶ *Sartor Resartus*, Book I, Chapter 3.

and in *The Tiger*,

When the stars threw down their spears,
And water'd heaven with their tears,

and in *London*,

And the hapless soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down palace walls,—

this last an amazing compression into two lines of the poet's conception of the horror and the source of war. A good illustration is to be found in the first adjective in the following paragraphs from one of the best of the recent war novels. The whole passage is worth studying as an example of vivid, image-making diction.

When you came in the space was desultory, rectangular, warm after the drip of the winter night, and transfused with a brown-orange dust that was light. It was shaped like the house a child draws. Three groups of brown limbs spotted with brass took dim high-lights from shafts that came from a bucket pierced with holes, filled with incandescent coke and covered in with a sheet of iron in the shape of a tunnel. Two men, as if hierarchically smaller, crouched on the floor beside the brazier; four, two at each end of the hut, drooped over tables in attitudes of extreme indifference. From the eaves above the parallelogram of black that was the doorway fell intermittent drippings of collected moisture, persistent, with glass-like intervals of musical sound. The two men squatting on their heels over the brazier—they had been miners—began to talk in a low sing-song of dialect, hardly audible. It went on and on, monotonously, without animation. It was as if one told the other long, long stories to which his companion manifested his comprehension or sympathy with animal grunts. . . .

An immense tea-tray, august, its voice filling the black circle of the horizon, thundered to the ground. Numerous pieces of sheet-iron said, "Pack. Pack. Pack." In a minute the clay floor of the hut shook, the drums of ears were pressed inwards, solid noise showered about the universe, enormous echoes pushed these men—to the right, to the left, or down towards the tables, and

crackling like that of flames among vast underwood became the settled condition of the night. Catching the light from the brazier as the head leaned over, the lips of one of the two men on the floor were incredibly red and full and went on talking and talking. . . .²⁷

Much imaginative writing is highly and elaborately figurative. The power of similes and metaphors, as we technically call comparisons, expressed and implied, or of personifications or the various other "figures of speech" of the old rhetorics, lies in their ability to suggest to the reader the image of a second object which, because of its essential similarity to the original object, and because of its greater familiarity or concreteness, will serve to intensify and clarify the image of the original object. This being the usual purpose of figurative language, those similes or metaphors or personifications will be lacking in imaginative value which fail to point out an essential likeness, choose for comparison a second object less familiar or less concrete, or distract the reader's imagination from the original stimulus.

The conceits of the seventeenth century were poor because the link between the two objects that were compared was a slender and un-significant thread. What induced Crashaw to compare the tear-filled eyes of the Magdalen to "two walking baths, two portable and compendious oceans"? Surely no essential likeness between them, nor yet any conviction that the picture or the significance of the weeper's eyes would be made clearer. We are not helped to an understanding of the sorrow and penitence of Mary Magdalen by such a comparison. The poet's motive was rather a desire for the unusual; it was the absurd extreme of the romantic love of the strange

²⁷ Ford, Ford Madox, *No More Parades* (A. & C. Boni, [c 1925]), pp. 1-2.

and fanciful. Conceits are to be found in modern poetry, also, as in the lines:

The moon is a frayed lace handkerchief
Pickpocketed by the breeze and caught
In the topmost coping of a skyscraper.²⁸

Fundamentally, this lack of essential similarity is the fault of the "pathetic fallacy." By this term Ruskin described the figure of speech by which a writer transfers to inanimate or at least non-human objects his own emotions or those of a character whom he has created. It is a fallacy because such objects cannot experience emotions; they are unlike the human beings with whom they are being compared in that most essential matter of the possession of emotions. Yet if the figure is truly "pathetic," that is, if it is truly based on and the result of strong emotion, it is often very effective in emphasizing emotion and conveying it to the reader. Because of strong feeling, it is comparatively easy and natural for a man to endow everything about him with that same feeling. It is only when the transfer is the result of an artificial whim, a seeking for effect, that the writer fails to arouse an emotional response in his reader. This is true of such a passage as this from Dryden's *Astræa Redux*:

The same indulgence Charles his voyage bless'd,
Which in his right had miracles confess'd.
The winds that never moderation knew,
Afraid to blow too much, too faintly blew;
Or out of breath with joy, could not enlarge
Their straighten'd lungs, or conscious of their charge.

Yet out of genuine emotion a writer may construct a figure, which, in spite of the fact that it is an example of

²⁸ Quoted in *Literary Review*, January 26, 1924, in a review of *I, a Minor Poet*, by E. Ralph Cheyney (privately printed, 1923).

pathetic fallacy, will lay a powerful hold on the imagination and the emotions of the reader. Such successful images are to be found most frequently, perhaps, in essays and poems about nature. The strong love for nature and the feeling of close kinship with her move the writer to a sense of a genuine emotional similarity between himself and the object which can, strictly speaking, have no such feelings. Marian Storm, in her essay, *A Woodland Valentine*, writes:

Forces astir in the deepest roots grow restless beneath the lock of frost. Bulbs try the door. February's stillness is charged with a faint anxiety, as if the powers of light, pressing up from the earth's center and streaming down from the stronger sun, had troubled the buried seeds, who strive to answer their liberator, so that the guarding mother must whisper over and over, "Not yet, not yet!" Better to stay behind the frozen gate than to come too early up into realms where the wolves of cold are still aprowl. Wisely the snow places a white hand over eager life unseen, but perceived in February's woods as a swimmer feels the changing moods of water in a lake fed by springs.²⁰

And Sidney Lanier writes in *Sunrise*,

Ye lispers, whisperers, singers in storms,
Ye consciences murmuring faiths under forms,
Ye ministers meet for each passion that grieves,
Friendly, sisterly, sweetheart leaves.

Since the main purpose of figurative language is to make the original object or image clearer, it should compare that object with something more, not less, familiar, more, not less, concrete. The aptness and force of many of Pope's comparisons are unmistakable, as in the lines from *An Essay on Criticism*:

'Tis with our judgments as our watches, none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own.

²⁰ From *Minstrel Weather* (Harper's, [1920]), pp. 7-8.

The tellers of parables and allegories know the value of the extended simile in making clear spiritual truths and in controlling the emotions and influencing the conduct of their hearers. Christ drew his comparisons from familiar objects and activities of the daily life of Palestine. The Kingdom of Heaven is like nothing abstruse or exotic; it is like a man, or a grain of mustard seed, or the leaven that leaveneth the whole lump. There is true poetry here. But the modern poet who compares love to "a wild bird's clawprick in the moon,"³⁰ has chosen an image so unfamiliar and so strange that, even though he may find a strong essential similarity, it is to be feared that he has done little by that figure to elucidate, for most readers, the mystery of love.

Yet it is also true that some images chosen presumably for the assistance they will give in the formation of another image are in themselves so beautiful or so highly suggestive that, although the second object may not be essentially similar to the original one, or may be less familiar or concrete, or may violate the third canon of good figures of speech and distract our attention from the original image, they will, by stirring imagination and feeling in the reader, bring him indirectly to a clearer comprehension of the nature and significance of the original object. So those lines from Rossetti's *The Blessed Damozel*, which describe the rampart of God's house, on which she was standing, although they are at first difficult to picture clearly, will bring to the reader a vivid suggestion of the distance, both physical and spiritual, between earth and Heaven.

It lies in Heaven, across the flood
Of ether, as a bridge.

³⁰ Scott, Geoffrey, "A Clawprick in the Moon," in *A Box of Paints* (London, at the office of the Bookman's Journal, 1923).

Beneath, the tides of day and night
With flame and darkness ridge
The void, as low as where this earth
Spins like a fretful midge.

And we can forgive the failure to make clearer the original object because of the beauty of the unfamiliar image to which the poet has distracted our attention in the following lines:

Yellow leaves among the green
like gold coins
deep in old fountains.³¹

Indeed, the more fundamental criticism here would be to ask what need there was of figurative language to make clear the original image. In these passages we take pleasure and find value in the suggested images for their own sake as well as because of the service they render us. The ancient users of the epic simile, in which the full picture of the object used for comparison is drawn, even though most of the details have no meaning in the comparison, relied upon this response on the part of their readers.

It has been the purpose of this chapter to suggest some of the many ways in which words may be effective as the expression of experience. It is obvious from the examples that have been given that it is not only single words that constitute style, but the way in which those words are put together. The rhetorics and books on composition try to instruct young writers how to secure emphasis, unity, coherence, in sentences. But the difficulty lies in the fact that these virtues may be attained and are attained by great writers in many different ways. Emphasis or force may be secured by the natural order of the sentence or

³¹ From "October," by Henry Bellaman. See *Cups of Illusion* (Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1923), p. 67.

the inverted order, by simple diction or elaborate. In the endeavor to appreciate and judge the value of the style of poetry or prose, we are often brought to answer with a vigorous affirmative the question, "Did it ever strike you that there was anything queer about the capacity of written words to absorb and convey feelings!"³² We may notice that they have been put together forcefully, harmoniously, and beautifully, that they make by their sound and their meaning images that are clear and vivid, beautiful and moving. And yet the final mystery remains. Mr. Dana, like many other writers, suggests the nearest approach we can make to a solution of the mystery. "But you don't find feelings in written words unless there were feelings in the men who used them. . . . Art won't put them there."³³ Wordsworth, in his famous Preface, said that he used personifications only when they were prompted by passion, and "endeavoured utterly to reject them as a mechanical device of style." Not merely figures of speech but all means for making language the expression of experience must be utterly rejected as mechanical devices of style. Language must be the sincere expression of the writer's experience. It must, as Mr. Lewisohn said, be in the "tones which the impact of that experience has itself brought forth." And so, although we may analyze and discuss style, although we may discover to a certain extent what makes it effective as an expression of the writer's experience by realizing the means by which it to a certain measure reproduces that experience in us, we can never really separate it from the content of literature. Style is nothing that is superadded to the ideas, the purposes, the emotions of the writer. In a very real sense, "style is the man."

³² Dana, Charles A., *Casual Essays of "The Sun"* (New York, R. L. Cooke, 1905), pp. 201-202.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

CHAPTER IX

PROSE FICTION

THE proof of the pudding is in the eating. The testing out of the theories evolved in the preceding chapters by applying them to the various forms of literature is the task of the chapters that follow; the principles in regard to the values of content and form, although not always explicitly mentioned, will be implicit in the discussion of the various forms of prose, of drama, and of poetry. It is obvious that no critical article or review will take account of every point that has been mentioned; nor will the reader consciously apply the measuring rod of these principles to everything that he reads. He should, however, by this time, either through agreement with the ideas developed in this book or through disagreement which may stimulate him to the formulation of principles of his own, have acquired a point of view and a method of approach to literature. He will have something definite to think and say, and will not need to take refuge in generalities and vague enthusiasms. The purpose of the remaining chapters is to discuss the forms of writing to which theoretical principles may be applied and to point out the special ways in which that application may be made. No one of the chapters pretends to be a complete treatment of the particular form of literature to which it is devoted. There are entire books on the study of prose fiction, or of poetry. A chapter can only suggest the critic's point of view.

The initial and indeed the greatest difficulty that con-

fronts a student of prose fiction is that its limits are so wide and its kinds so various. Sketch, tale, short story, romance, novel,—not even these names exhaust the kinds. Any attempt at classification leads inevitably to minute subdividing and the danger of overlapping. There is in criticism today a salutary tendency away from classification as confusing and pedantic, and toward an examination rather of the fundamental characteristics that are common to all types of prose fiction. We must, perhaps, still acknowledge the existence of the various types and still use their names, as we do in the case of drama and poetry as well, and we must recognize the necessity of making certain modifications in our critical attitude toward one type or another. But we are wise to keep free from any attempt to lay down laws for the composition of the novel as such or the short story as such. Our next day of reading may bring a great novel or a great short story that violates those laws. It is the part of wisdom to criticise prose fiction as one phase or form of the expression of experience. The general principles which govern the expression of experience in narrative prose will be found to apply to all forms of it, long or short, romantic or realistic. The nature of the experience, its suitability to prose fiction, the value of that experience to others, the success with which the artist has expressed it,—these are the questions for the critic to ask and answer.

Whatever the writer's experience, if he is to put it into narrative form, it will, with exceptions which are negligible in number, be concerned with human life. This fact must lie at the basis of all discussion of fiction. It is the reason for the almost universal liking for this form of writing. Narrative poetry and drama rest, in general, upon this same foundation, but they are more highly specialized than prose fiction and submit to other laws

than those of mere narrative. A play is a story told in the form of action; narrative poetry must fulfill the requirements for poetry as well as for narrative. Prose fiction is less complex in its nature and, in modern times at least, it is the more natural form of narrative. M. Jourdain had spoken in prose all his life without knowing it. The reader's chief concern is with the story itself, the narrative art of the writer. If that story is to be truly a great work of art, the style or the imaginative expression must be commensurate in value with the narrative power. But it is probably true that more novels have been saved by the sheer interest or beauty of the story than by the independent excellence and beauty of the style.

In all art, the personality of the artist is the medium through which his experience is conveyed. It is his interpretation of the life he has lived or seen or imagined that makes the novelist's record of life valuable to others. The familiar essayist or the lyric poet puts much of his own personality into the expression of his experience. It is not always so with the novelist. Sometimes he shares his personality, his ideas and ideals, openly with the public, making perfectly clear his opinions of the people and the events which he is recording. Sometimes he withdraws into himself, so that he seems like an impersonal and impartial observer of life, whose acquaintance we cannot make through his works. The one man puts his personality perhaps into one of the characters, perhaps merely into the descriptive and analytical material of the novel; the other keeps his personality strictly outside the pages of his book. The one man is what the psychologists call an extrovert, the other an introvert. Yet fundamentally their art is the same. The process of selection which every artist must use will keep the extrovert from an indecent exposure of his soul and will give us proof,

in the case of the introvert, that a human personality and not a machine has done the necessary sifting of experience. Art is self-expression.

In any case, it is from personality to personality that the vital current of the story passes. The writer must send his experience and his sense of the significance of that portion of human life which he has experienced over to the reader. What are the bridges between personality and personality which the writer of prose fiction uses?

The bridge over which most traffic passes is that of interest. *Interesting* is the adjective most frequently applied to fiction by its readers. Used without discrimination or explanation it is critically of very little use. Yet it is an indication of the demand most often made upon our writers of novels and short stories. And it is a legitimate demand. The curiosity of the reading public about life, whether familiar or strange to its own experience, should be answered by a record of life that will be full of interest. Interest will mean different things to different people, to be sure, and no writer of fiction can hope to attract every reader who opens his book. But interest of some sort there must be. And if the reader can give reasons why a book is interesting to him, he becomes truly critical. He stands at one end of that bridge of interest to receive what is sent to him from the other extremity by the personality of the writer. And the pillars on which the Bridge of Interest is built are those of plot, characters, setting, and ideas.

"The double plot," says Mrs. Wharton, "has long since vanished, and the 'plot' itself, in the sense of an elaborate puzzle into which a given number of characters have to be arbitrarily fitted, has gone with it to the lumber-room of discarded conventions."¹ To a great extent

¹ Wharton, *The Writing of Fiction*, p. 82.

this is true. There are few novels written today that are constructed on the elaborate dramatic model which older novelists used. There are few writers who weave an intricate pattern of plot and sub-plot as did Dickens and Thackeray. This change has gone hand in hand with the change in narrative method. We find today that often, in place of the omniscient author of the older novels, who could describe the deeds and analyze the thoughts and the motives of any of his characters at will, we have an author who identifies himself with one character in the story and describes everything which takes place from that single point of view. This does not necessarily mean that the story is told in the first person; it merely means that the author has adopted for the duration of his story the point of view of, usually, his main character, and that nothing is recorded which that character could not himself have seen or known. This change in method is undoubtedly the result of the greater stress upon psychology and even upon psycho-analysis in modern fiction. The novelist of today feels that he can more successfully present a character by means of introspection on that character's part or by means merely of recording his behavior and that of the people with whom he comes in contact than by presenting an analysis of his temperament by an external observer. This has distinct advantages in rousing the interest and stirring the feelings of the reader. If we are particularly concerned with one character, we are glad to be invested as far as possible with the body of that person, to see with his eyes, to hear with his ears, to think his thoughts, to feel his emotions.

With this choice of a single point of view for the narration, the plot which involves many groups of characters proves not feasible. As a result, there are in modern fiction fewer characters, and the narrative is simpler and

moves more directly from beginning to end. Yet the older novels, with their omniscient author and their involved dramatic plots and their numerous characters, are still with us and will be with us, many of them, until novels cease to be read. We still can recognize, although we may eschew it for our own use, the beauty of the carefully constructed plot, with its interwoven threads, its gradual rising to a climax and its falling action and denouement. We should be loth to give up the kind of interest generated by such a plot. We should also lose much if some of the older novels were simplified and rewritten from the single point of view. In *Vanity Fair* we should miss much of the satire. We should also miss much of the pathos. We could never have, for example, that paragraph which closes the account of Waterloo: "No more firing was heard at Brussels—the pursuit rolled miles away. Darkness came down on the field and city: and Amelia was praying for George, who was lying on his face, dead, with a bullet through his heart."² Our vision in that chapter of three people at once, Becky, Amelia, and George, brings home to us the irony of the situation.

Yet, although the modern novelist and the modern critic may have sent the omniscient author and the dramatic plot "to the lumber-room of discarded conventions," they have not sent there, nor can they ever send story interest. The story tellers of ancient and primitive peoples have known that they could hold their audiences by the sheer fascination of their answers to the repeated question,—what happened next? Fiction of adventure holds the oldest place in the history of narrative writing, and even today it holds a very high place. From the Greek novels, down through the mediæval romances, the

² Volume II, Chapter 4.

picaresque tales, Defoe's stories of adventure on land and sea, on desert islands and unknown continents, Scott's historical novels, Cooper's stories of the deeds of Natty Bumppo, Melville's accounts of adventure in the South Seas, Stevenson's beloved books, to Conrad's tales of men and ships, narratives that appeal through the unfolding of the story have been among the best sellers. With youth, whether it be in the race or in the individual, stories like these will always find a market. Yet they are not only for children; there is in all of us, if we are not too sophisticated and blasé and introspective, a portion of our hearts that goes out to meet the high heart of the adventurer. The boy who goes about imitating the hero of his last adventure tale still lives in most of us. Such books furnish a real literature of escape for those of us who live monotonous lives. We can get from them refreshment and excitement that will color the most drab existence. Romance will provide a healthful escape for us only when it takes us out of our real lives into a world of adventure. Harm is done when impossibilities, or, worse still, improbabilities, are represented as a natural accompaniment of ordinary lives. The story in which the stenographer-heroine marries her employer and moves with ease amid the luxuries of life in the highest society, provides for the stenographer-reader not an escape but a cause of discontent and restlessness and fruitless daydreams. Truth may be stranger than fiction, and adventure of a kind may be lying in wait for us every day; but it is not of that kind. But it is possible to set sail with Conrad or to wander through the forests of England with Scott's Locksley and then to return to everyday life refreshed and rested.

The unfolding of the story is a powerful source of interest, however, in other fiction besides that of adventure.

It is not only in the account of the experiences of a pirate on the high seas or a detective from Scotland Yard that we turn the pages quickly to find out what happens next. The fascination of the events of the story may be just as strong in a novel that portrays life realistically rather than romantically. In fact, the power to absorb the reader in the events of the story is the first requirement of the novelist. Without it, an artist may write a good character study, a good picture of older or contemporary manners, a good satire, a good tract, but not supreme fiction. Not that story interest alone is sufficient to make great fiction; but it is a necessary ingredient. Like the salt in a recipe, its absence will make the product, if judged *as a story*, flat and tasteless.

The chemical composition of salt may not interest the man who consumes the dish which it seasons. But the elements that go to make up the interest of the story or plot are the definite concern of the critical reader. What are the characteristics of the plot that keep us absorbed in its progress and unfolding? Brander Matthews said that "no one has ever succeeded as a writer of Short-stories who had not ingenuity, originality, and compression."³ The third of these qualifications belongs so particularly to the writer of short stories, that we shall not discuss it here, where we are concerned with the writing of fiction in general. The others suggest two of the ways in which a plot may be made interesting.

Ingenuity is perhaps the least noble of the qualifications of the writer of prose fiction. We associate the word with the plots of detective stories, or at best, with the inventions of O. Henry. The author who is ingenious in devising unusual predicaments for his characters and in crowning his story with an unexpected twist in the plot,

³ *The Philosophy of the Short-Story*, p. 23.

we are inclined to call a clever craftsman but not necessarily an artist. Some of the greatest stories are so simple and straightforward in plot that we should never think of calling them ingenious. There seems to be no intricacy, no contrivance in their unfolding. Yet, although ingenuity is not a necessary qualification of great fiction, it is often associated, in fact as in etymology, with genius. The great story tellers like Dumas and Scott and Dickens wove the threads of their plot into an intricate and ingenious pattern. The masters of mystery stories, like Poe, have put their utmost ingenuity into the working out of a logical plot. And there is no doubt that much of our interest in a story is due to the involutions of the pattern. The ingenuity of the plot pleases our intellect and excites our curiosity as to the manner in which it is to be evolved.

The second qualification also raises a question. Must plots be original and new to be interesting? The pragmatic test would answer this question at once in the negative. Writers on the art of narrative have unoriginally echoed the Preacher and declared that there is no new thing under the sun and that the plots of the world may be reduced in number to a basic three or six and thirty.⁴ Many a novel, reduced to its lowest terms, would prove to be positively trite in plot. How many times has the eternal triangle been used, or the theme of the unsuitable marriage, or that of betrayed innocence. Reduce even *Vanity Fair* to its minimum of plot, and it will be found to consist of two interlocking triangles, Becky-Rawdon-Lord Steyne and Becky-Amelia-George, with Dobbin somewhat in the position of the man who is trying to solve the puzzle by getting the triangles apart, and sees

⁴ See, for example, Clark, Glenn, *A Manual of the Short Story Art* (Macmillan, 1922), pp. 234-252.

no possibility of doing so save by breaking at least one side of one of them. King Cophetua marries the beggar maid frequently in fiction. *Jane Eyre*, which has been called a glorified dime novel, has all the conventional elements of the governess who falls in love with her employer, the insane wife, and the fire which burns up the wife and the difficulties. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is essentially the story of betrayed innocence. Yet no one of these novels will seem trite and stale to the reader. The old materials have been so combined that the result is essentially original. It may be a new turn in an old plot, it may be a social satire, it may be a profound study of character which glorifies and gives freshness to the conventional theme. The interest of the reader is caught by the originality of the treatment, and the critic need question no further.

To these two qualifications for an absorbing plot, ingenuity and originality, should be added a still more important one, plausibility. Aristotle said, "A likely impossibility is always preferable to an unconvincing possibility."⁵ The wildest flights of fancy may be made convincing if they are handled in a convincing manner. It has been said that "you may ask your reader to believe anything you can *make* him believe."⁶ This power of convincing results from proper motivation. "Why did he do that?" is a question that the writer of fiction must be able to answer. If he cannot, the reader is bound to feel that the plot has been manufactured mechanically and that it is riding the characters. We know that in life actions are sometimes inconsequential in appearance, but usually we can find a reason for them if we search far

⁵ *Poetics*, Chapter 24 (Bywater's translation).

⁶ Quoted by Mrs. Wharton (*op. cit.*, p. 38) as the saying of "a wise critic."

enough into the circumstances or into the characters of the persons involved. An inconsequential act may be the deed of an inconsequential character, or it may have connections with other events so concealed that they are not visible to the casual observer. But the artist, even though he may be drawing a realistic picture of life, must so exercise the art of selection that reasons and connections will be clear, at any rate to the careful reader. Such reasons and connections should not lie on the surface of the story, where they will be too mechanically obvious; but they should be present to enable the reader to satisfy any queries which he may have.

No story, however, no matter how ingenious or original or plausible the plot may be, will attain to its maximum power to interest and absorb the reader unless it is unified. It is not an artificial unity that the critic requires, but that fundamental singleness of tone and aim which rigidly excludes every detail that does not lead straight to the climax of the story.⁷ If our attention is focussed upon the characters or the ideas set forth in a novel, we may be willing to be led aside for digressions that in themselves are interesting and valuable. It is such digressions that make a book like *Tristram Shandy*. But when we are concerned with the progress of the story itself, we are impatient of material so irrelevant. And the good story teller knows that the moment of supreme interest must be held for the catastrophe or climax of the story, "the final allotment of fortune to the personages of" the novel.⁸ The catastrophe need not be outwardly the most dramatic incident of the book. In narratives of adventure or incident, it should be so. For in a plot in which the

⁷ See Chapter VII for a discussion of the climax and of the different uses of the word.

⁸ Perry, *A Study of Prose Fiction*, p. 60.

reader's attention is held by the excitement of the successive episodes, there must be a heightening, not a lowering of the excitement in the episode which completes the tale. But in those stories, short or long, in which the main interest lies elsewhere, as in the characters or the ideas, the dramatic climax may be perhaps somewhere toward the middle of the book, as it often is in the drama, and the catastrophe may come in the form of a quiet resolution of the fortunes of the main characters. If that is surely indicated by the progression of events, even an unfinished novel, such as Olive Shreiner's *From Man to Man*, may satisfy as a work of art. Yet, had that book been completed, the reader, although fairly sure of the nature of the outcome, would have been unwilling to lay down the book until the end had been reached. In that unwillingness, which should be ours whenever we are reading a good narrative, lies the proof of the interest and the power of the catastrophe. Even though it affords no surprise, even though there is no uncertainty as to the outcome, the reader should be held in suspense as to the exact manner of its working out and should be kept interested in every detail that leads to the end. We can re-read great works of fiction with as profound interest and as deep absorption as when we read them first.

Often the reader's interest and attention are caught and held by the characters in a story rather than by the narrative itself. Indeed the most frequent form which modern fiction takes is that of the novel of character or, as it is sometimes called, the psychological novel. Prose fiction first took the form of the adventure story; then there developed the novel of manners; and last there grew to maturity with the new developments in psychology itself, the psychological novel. This Mrs. Wharton

calls "the modern novel" in her book, *The Writing of Fiction*:

Modern fiction really began when the 'action' of the novel was transferred from the street to the soul. . . . The next advance was made when the protagonists of this new inner drama were transformed from conventionalized puppets—the hero, the heroine, the villain, the heavy father and so on—into breathing and recognizable human beings. . . . But even from 'Manon Lescaut' and the 'Neveu de Rameau,' even from Lesage, Defoe, Fielding, Smollett, Richardson, and Scott, modern fiction is differentiated by the great dividing geniuses of Balzac and Stendhal. Save for that one amazing accident of Diderot's ['Neveu de Rameau'], Balzac was the first not only to see his people, physically and morally, in their habit as they lived, with all their personal hobbies and infirmities, and make the reader see them, but to draw his dramatic action as much from the relation of his characters to their houses, streets, towns, professions, inherited habits and opinions, as from their fortuitous contacts with each other.*

All the schools of modern psychology are represented in contemporary fiction. Psycho-analysis is practised, not only upon great men and women long dead, but also upon those who exist only in the imaginations of the novelists. Elaborate studies of the influence of environment or of heredity upon a character are made and cast into the form of fiction. Records are drawn up of the physical behavior of an individual or a group of people under certain given circumstances. One type of novel has been given the rather cumbrous name, "the stream-of-consciousness novel": it is a minute analysis of the mental processes of a single person or of several persons through a given period of time, perhaps even for so short a space as a single day. Critics too are interested in psychology, and tend to turn the searchlight upon the character portrayal in all fiction, old and new. And they usually find

* Pp. 3-5.

that the older novelists, although they were unacquainted with the jargon of the modern schools, knew men and women well enough to create characters who can endure without shrinking that probing and revealing light.

This concern of both writer and reader with character is right and natural. Fiction reflects life, and life is peopled with men and women in whose fortunes we are all, by reason of our common humanity, interested to a greater or less degree. When the fortunes of one person or a group of persons are brought together within the unifying limits of the covers of a novel, our attention is focussed upon those individuals. Instead of total strangers, they quickly become intimates. Although, as has been said, our first interest in fiction is in the story, the course of events, it is also true that those events interest us largely because they take place in connection with human beings and we are apt to find our greatest pleasure in well-drawn characters. Even in novels that are not primarily studies of character, it is often the characters who draw the criticism. Hairbreadth escapes and horrible experiences fail to thrill the discriminating reader if they are the escapes and the experiences of mechanical dolls. And a study of background and of older or contemporary manners or a presentation of ideas in fictional form fails to attain to its greatest power of interesting the reader unless interesting characters move against the background or express the ideas in speech and action.

In judging any work of fiction, therefore, old or new, short or long, irrespective of whether it emphasizes character, incident, setting, or ideas, it is an important part of a critic's function to determine whether or not the characters are interesting. The reasons why people in a book are interesting are very much the same as the reasons why our friends and neighbors are interesting. We are not

concerned here with a question of liking or dislike, and we must not confound dislike of a character with unfavorable criticism of the portrayal of a character. We may intensely dislike him, but that does not mean that he is poorly drawn. In fact, such intense dislike will scarcely result from poor artistry on the part of the author; it argues an interest that can be felt only in a vividly presented figure. We like or dislike our neighbors because they possess certain virtues or vices which attract or repel; we are interested or uninterested in them for other reasons.

But before we enumerate the reasons why we are interested in the characters of fiction, we must agree that such interest is possible only if the characters are real. The author who makes his characters seem real is the man whose observation of actual human nature is keen. Whether or not he knows the laws of psychology, he causes his men and women to act in accordance with their own natures. Knowing them thoroughly himself, he is aware of what they can and cannot do. What they do may often be a surprise to the reader, but so sometimes are the actions of our friends. And we always realize that what was done was actually the only possibility for the character as we have come to know him through the author's eyes. How delightfully consistent are all the caprices of Ethel Newcome, all the prejudices and honest changes in opinion of Elizabeth Bennett, all the little cruel plans of Sylvia Tietjens. There is no monotony or staleness here or in any skillfully portrayed character; yet there is the satisfying stability of a nature true to its own laws. This stability is secured not by showing only one aspect of a character, flat and unvarying, but by enabling us to see all sides, all aspects, under the changing influences of environment. As was said in another connection,

they are not like paper dolls, pasted flat to the page,—these real book people; they stand out from the page that we may walk around them and see them from every side.

Yet we may walk around a statue. Dryden said of the formal and regular plays of the French that they had the beauties of a statue and not of a man. It is not enough that the character of a novel shall be three-dimensional; he must also have life. The expression of his face must not remain ever the same, as does that of a statue; it must change with varying moods. And those changes must be lifelike, not mechanical. Through what divine aid does our Pygmalion of an author turn his statue into flesh and blood? It truly seems at times an act of divine or at least of god-given power, before which we can only marvel. Yet it is possible to analyze it and to recognize some of the means by which a creature of the imagination is made to live before our eyes.

For this as for other purposes the artist calls into play his powers of selection. In describing and in presenting his character he chooses gestures, habits of speech and action, which shall not only characterize but give the impression of reality. These are, perhaps, gestures and phrases which he has noticed in observing living people or which he knows he uses himself. They may be quite trivial in themselves but highly significant not only in illustrating a trait but in making the owner of that trait appear real. The reader finds in his own experience (or perhaps in himself) a man who uses his hands in such a way or smiles or speaks as does the character in the story. And vivid expression added to artistic selection makes the character not only real but memorable. The following description of a child taken from Olive Shreiner's *From Man to Man*, is a good illustration:

She looked around to find a spot where the tree cast a deeper shade than elsewhere. Here she walked round and round on the grass, like a dog, and then lay down on her back in the place she had made. It was like a nest, with the grass standing several inches high all round.

She drew up her legs, cocking one knee over the other, so that one foot waved in the air.

It was very nice. She lay for a while with her hands clasped across the top of her head, from which she had thrown her white kappie. The pear-tree leaves were so thick overhead you could hardly see any sky through them. She yawned luxuriously. Beyond the edges of the pear branches, here and there as you looked through half-closed eyes, were strips of blue sky, and some great, white masses of thunder cloud were showing in them, like ships sailing in the blue. She watched them for a while with her eyes half shut; then she took up the book that lay on the grass at her side, stood it open on her chest against her knee, and gently waved the foot that was cocked up in the air.³⁰

Sometimes in portraying a character an author chooses to emphasize a dominant trait by repeating frequently a characteristic gesture or phrase. Uriah Heep, constantly 'umble, is constantly wringing his hands. Mr. Micawber is always waiting for something to turn up, and his wife will never desert him. Barkis is always willin' and Peggotty's buttons are continually flying off her back under stress of emotion. Mrs. Wilfer frequently binds up her face, puts on her gloves, and is silently uncomplaining. Dickens, who uses this device more than other novelists, is often criticised for exaggeration that amounts to caricature. Yet this is emphasis rather than exaggeration. It may lead to caricature, but who shall say that even caricature has not its place in fiction? It makes the character memorable, and it serves its purpose well in satire and the attempt at reform, as the newspaper caricaturists know. And Dickens' characters are far from being unreal:

³⁰ *From Man to Man* (Harper's, 1927), p. 14.

we are frequently inclined to say of people whom we see or meet or know, "There is a man straight from the pages of Dickens."

There are, of course, in some kinds of fiction, characters that are not intended to seem real. Such fantastic creatures of the imagination interest us partly because of their very strangeness, partly because of the human qualities which they possess. It is in this very union of the real and the unreal that the fascination of the creations of whimsical fancy lies. The Thin Woman of Inis Magrath would not hold so great an appeal if she merely belonged to the Shee of Croghan Conghaile. She belongs also to a husband. And she not only gives him rheumatism by the power of her eye when she is angry; she leaves lumps in his stirabout. It is only the artist who can strike the exact balance between reality and unreality.

Fantastic fiction of high quality, however, is comparatively rare. On the whole, novelists attempt to make their characters seem real, and the good and the great succeed in doing so. Granted, then, that we have a real personality in the story before us, what is it that, as in real life, makes him interesting? In real life, to be sure, there are many people who are totally uninteresting. Such are seldom found in good fiction, however, unless they may be used as a foil for other characters. The novelist, as does Howells or Trollope, for example, finds something interesting in the most commonplace person.

It is generally true that we find a person interesting if, in one way or another, for one reason or another, he stimulates us. He may rouse us to thought, to physical action, to vision, to desire and ambition. Through him we may be stirred to thrilling experience, actual or vicarious, physical or mental. He challenges us to examine

and to exercise our bodies or our minds. In the capacity to be roused, as in other matters, individuals differ greatly from one another. A given stimulus will not produce a response from everyone. But granting that such differences exist, the general statement still holds true: what stimulates a person interests him.

Another individual may stimulate us because of his unusualness. The new, the unexpected, the strange, have interest for us. Thus a man may be interesting whose nature and ideas and habits are opposed to ours. We may possibly not like or approve such a person, but we shall probably find him interesting. Also the man who has had new and strange experiences in foreign countries, or who finds something different and unusual in his daily life, who discovers what is

Rare, or at least so seeming, every day
Found all about me in one neighborhood,²¹

or who has new and thought-provoking ideas, will stimulate and interest us. But if he has had new experiences and ideas, he must be able to talk of them in an interesting way. He must be able to make the unusualness of his adventures and his thoughts clear and vivid. Or the talk itself may have the element of the unexpected, the sudden turn of phrase or thought that makes conversation witty and acts as a spur to the listener's interest. A man, then, may interest us because he is an individual, because his experiences and his ideas differ in greater or less degree from our own or from those of the great average, because those differences make his personality worth exploring.

On the other hand, a person may be interesting to us by reason of the very likenesses that bind him to hu-

²¹ Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, Book I, ll. 110-111.

manity as a whole. Because, though an individual, he is typical of man or of some class or division of humanity, he may be worth our attention and exploration. He will challenge us to a broader, less personal interest. Yet our interest may be very strong; the universal may stimulate us as powerfully as the particular.

All these principles may be applied to the characters in fiction. The characters of a Scott or a Stevenson or a Conrad may interest us because of their new and strange adventures; those of a Dreiser, if we ourselves are as little neurotic as may be, because their natures and habits and ideas are so different from ours; those of a Trollope or a Howells because there proves to be something out of the ordinary in apparently colorless lives; those of a Meredith because their conversation sparkles with the unexpected turns of wit. And the people of all the great fiction of the world will interest us because their characters are universal: although they are individuals and interesting as such, they are also typical of humanity and of the group to which they belong. Their individual traits are nicely balanced with the traits of the profession, the social class, the age, the special part the character has to play, the period, the locality, or the nationality. A young British nobleman is young and British and aristocratic as well as a man.

A novelist has at his disposal many means of making clear and vivid the interest of his characters. He may often do it through the very juxtaposition of the characters in the working out of the plot, a structural device which naturally and strongly emphasizes the separate personalities. The contrast between persons thrown together by the exigencies of the story stresses individual traits. Elizabeth Bennett gains in definiteness by being seen in contrast with her sister Jane, as does Darcy in contrast

with Bingley. There are many pairs of brothers or sisters or friends or rivals in fiction, each member of which sheds light upon the other.

This structural device is supplemented or reinforced by many different methods of presenting the character to the reader. In older fiction there is a great deal of description and analysis by the author. In more recent novels, the author has yielded place to the protagonist himself, who analyzes his own character and shows others as they affect him. This last method is close to the distinctly dramatic way of presenting a character, through the speech and action of the person and his relationship to the other members of the group in which he moves. Many authors use a number of different methods in combination. George, for instance, in *Vanity Fair*, is shown through his own words and actions, and also as he appears to Amelia, to Becky, and to Dobbin, as well as to Thackeray himself. Booth Tarkington, in that remarkably penetrating study of an unpopular girl, *Alice Adams*, shows us Alice as she appears to others, as she speaks, and through his own comments; but chiefly does he show her to us through her actions, for her life, at least on exhibition, is one of gestures.¹²

It is through speech, however, that a writer is often most successful in revealing character. Not everyone can construct good dialogue, and there are those who are wise enough to reduce it to a minimum. Often they keep it for the high points of the story, and employ it to mark an emotional climax. Sometimes the novelist may use it effectively for the revelation of character without seeming in the least to have constructed it for a special purpose. The novelist with a strong dramatic tendency, like

¹² See, for example, *Alice Adams* (Doubleday, Page & Co., 1921), pp. 14-15, 43, 365.

Dickens, will use it freely and well. Jane Austen employs it for several purposes: to advance her narrative, to paint her background (it is interesting that she almost never describes), and especially to portray character. The first two chapters of *Pride and Prejudice* form a masterpiece of revealing dialogue. The plot is started on its way, the stage is set, with all the necessary drops and furniture, and, above all, every member of the Bennett family is etched indelibly on the reader's mind.

The setting or background of a story may contribute largely to the interest. Especially is this true in the historical novel or the novel of manners, whose purpose is to offer us a picture of society, past or contemporary. The value of the novel of manners often lies in its power to transport us to the midst of a new group, with new interests. It brings us new friends, new ideas, or it interprets to us our own environment from a new point of view. It is seldom, of course, without the interest found in the characters who people this new or new-old environment. But in the novel of manners the background or setting bears its full share of the burden of entertainment. And in that fiction which is not designed especially to show the social background it has its importance, though subordinate usually to that of the story or the characters.

The setting of the story serves many purposes in the construction of a novel or a short story. At its best it is closely connected either with the action or with the characters. It may, however, be used merely as a picturesque background for them. If so, it becomes interesting and attractive largely for its own sake, and its claim to merit rests mainly upon the beauty and the vividness of the description. More often, however, it is of more service to the reader. It may present the environment of the

characters in such a way as to explain their natures and their deeds. Even in a short story, an author may give it considerable space. De Maupassant takes several pages in *A Piece of String* to describe a fair day in Brittany, that we may know out of what suspicious as well as out of what thrifty surroundings the old man comes. The setting may make the narrative more real, not only because it creates a visual image of the background, but often because it reflects the characters or because it offers a contrast with them or because it responds to and sympathizes with their emotions. Or it may, as in the novels of Thomas Hardy, become almost an actor in the scene itself. Sometimes the background is one of neighbors, habits, customs, nationality; sometimes one of natural scenery.

Many individual writers have chosen particular backgrounds, and have used the same setting in most of their work. Arnold Bennett, for example, writes of the Five Towns, Dickens of London, Bret Harte of California, Edward Eggleston of the Hoosier country, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman of New England, Kipling of India. Or they have chosen a certain type of setting rather than an actual locality, as Jane Austen chose the small English village, James Fenimore Cooper the frontier, whether in New York or in the far west, Conrad the sea. The presentation of an historical setting requires more research on the part of the writer, that of our own street and town the more care. There is interest in each, for we are both delighted to learn of the strange and pleased to recognize the familiar. The danger in the historical novel is that the background shall be too elaborate; in the novel of contemporary life that it shall be slighted until there is no feeling of an encircling atmosphere. Mrs. Wharton, for instance, in her four little stories of Old New York, has

so crowded her background that the reader can scarcely turn around without bumping into a poke bonnet or a hoop skirt or a four poster bed or an antimacassar. It is harder for us to judge of novels with contemporary settings, for our familiarity with the background puts to sleep our critical sense; without much difficulty we supply deficiencies out of our own experience. Time alone will tell whether our chroniclers of New York and Chicago and Gopher Prairie have painted as vivid a picture as Jane Austen did of the English village of her day, or Dickens of his London.

Most novelists present the background of their books near the beginning of the story. That background, if it is at all important, will enter the story again and again as the narrative progresses, and will be re-pictured and developed and elaborated; but the main lines of it will be drawn early. There are two main methods of presenting background, by means of pictures and by means of drama, that is, through direct description and through the characters and their speech and action. From a shelf of fiction pick books at random. *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* begins with a long and vivid description of the Palace of Justice at the Festival of Fools in 1482. *Quo Vadis* opens with an account of a day in the life of Petronius, *The House of the Seven Gables* with a description of the old Pyncheon dwelling, *The Luck of Roaring Camp* with the "commotion in Roaring Camp," *Adam Bede* with a description of the workshop, *Mansfield Park* with an account of the social status of the family into which Fanny is to come, *Our Mutual Friend* with that gruesome scene on the river, *Joseph Vance* with Joe's own story of an incident in which his father was concerned. Thus we get, by one method or another, at the very opening of the story, a clear vision

of the environment, physical, social, or spiritual, in which the characters are to live their lives.

These presentations of background the critic must examine for clarity and vividness. These two qualities will depend largely on the imaginative choice of detail. He must examine them also for accuracy, although, from the artistic point of view, accuracy may not be as important as vividness. We are not really, unless we are scholars, so much concerned with getting the correct atmosphere as with getting an atmosphere. The critic must consider the unity and consistency of effect, the purpose for which the background is used, the skill with which it is related to characters and action, the effect which it has upon the imagination of the reader to help him in grasping the idea and purpose of the writer and in feeling strongly with author and characters. For setting is of little use unless it serves to emphasize the content values of the novel, and to lend reality and vividness to the characters.

Fiction may be interesting also because of the ideas expressed or illustrated in it. Into the fiction of a period more than into any other form of writing are woven contemporary ideas and beliefs. Sometimes novels are written for the express purpose of propagating a certain idea; sometimes they are satiric in temper and represent an attacking, destructive force rather than a propagating one; sometimes they merely reflect current thinking.

The fiction of propaganda is very plentiful and has always been. It is not always long-lived. By the nature of the case, unless a novel that advocates a contemporary idea tells a story or portrays characters that will be perennially interesting, interest in the book itself will flag when the idea becomes outdated. Too many novels of propaganda have rested their whole case upon the immediate appeal of the idea they are attempting to spread, and

their doom has been soon sealed. They survive, if at all, largely as an indication of the thought of the period in which they were written. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a familiar example. The novels that are written to effect social or political reform, whether they take the shape of direct presentation of the existing evils or of utopian schemes for an ideal future state, will not all continue to live and be read after enthusiasm for the causes they represent has died away. It is questionable, for instance, whether many of Mr. Wells' books will stand the test of time; it is fairly certain that Dickens' novels will. In these years after the enthusiasm of the Great War has passed and before the next generation that knew not the horror of it comes to maturity, there are a number of men who, having known personally the dreadfulness and the futility of the conflict, are writing in the spirit of Ford Madox Ford:

Few writers can have engaged themselves as combatants in what, please God, will yet prove to be the war that ended war, without the intention of aiding with their writings, if they survived, in bringing about such a state of mind as should end wars as possibilities.²³

Some of these returned soldiers are writing in bitter anger, some in hopeful idealism, some with the desire merely to present war as it really is, stripped of the romantic trappings of much war fiction. The fate of their books will be determined partly by the time it takes the world to come to agreement with their opinions, but far more by their ability to present characters and tell a story in which readers may always be absorbed, whether they live on a warlike or a warless earth.

Satiric fiction, if the satire is directed, not against tem-

²³ *No More Parades* (A. & C. Boni, [c 1925]), Dedicatory Letter, p. vi.

porary abuses but against universal and perennial vices and follies, is apt to be longer-lived than the fiction of propaganda. The satire may, as in the case of Thackeray's books, become a novel of manners, which interests because of the social background as well as because of the ideas expressed. But again it is the story and the people that are important in making the novel great. If the satirist is so obsessed by his idea that he warps story and characters to fit it, he fails to attain the balance necessary for true art, and he may write a bitter and arresting denunciation of a social evil that will catch the interest of a great number of people for the time being, but he will not write a great and permanent novel. We see instances of such temporary success and ultimate failure in every generation.

There are also many novels which do not especially advocate, which do not satirize, but which merely express contemporary thought. The movements of society, great and small, can be traced through the history of fiction. Chivalry, decorum, humanitarianism, the French Revolution, feminism, the industrial revolution, the theory of evolution,—these and many others are reflected in the narratives written and enjoyed in the days when they were the chief concern of all thinking men and women. Today the multitudinous currents of public thought flow through our novels and short stories. Modern psychology—Freud or Watson—, modern social theory, the discoveries of modern science—even monkey glands—, modern religion, modern political philosophy, modern educational theory are all to be found there. Such themes and ideas must be made, as Wordsworth said of science, “manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings.” Usually, unless the idea lies too much in the realm of the abstract, contemporary thought can

be so made. It can be linked with living characters and an absorbing story.

Great fiction, indeed, will always be the fiction of ideas. It will appeal to our intellect by the freshness, the importance, the pertinence, the permanence, and the truth of the thought which it contains. No matter how absorbing the story, or how charming the people, or how fascinating the setting, part of the interest will lie in the ideas which give to the book intellectual substance.

Something of the beauty of the book also, as well as its interest, may be due to its thought. And this is important, for the second bridge from the personality of the writer to the personality of the reader is that of Beauty. It is less frequently used by writers of fiction, perhaps, than the Bridge of Interest, and fewer readers stand at the other end of it. Although most of us demand beauty of poetry, we are not so apt to require it of fiction. Yet great art, we have assumed, is always beautiful. There are many stories, short and long, whose beauty impresses us more strongly and more quickly than their interest. *Beautiful* rather than *interesting* is the word that first comes to the lips in appreciation. And every good work of fiction, even though it interests us first of all, will bear in its theme and ideas, in its characters and its meaning for human life, in its imaginative expression, the unmistakable signs that it is the creation of an artist, of a man with a sense of beauty. For the reader it will perform the function of all beautiful things: it will give him a sense of balance and harmony as he contemplates it.

We may find that the very theme of the story has that power of synæsthesia,—themes of tenderness without sentimentality, of pathos, of tragedy; themes of joy, of happiness, of successful fulfillment of hopes and desires. To the substance of thoroughly realistic or naturalistic

fiction we seldom apply the word *beautiful*. Such stories give us a sense of frustration, of incompleteness rather than of harmony and balance. They may, of course, be intensely interesting. But some ideals of love, of friendship, of sacrifice and service must be there before we recognize the presence of beauty in the content of the book. We may find those ideals in the events, in the ideas, in the background, above all in the characters, the same places where we also find interest. A book that is without significance for human life we may find interesting and absorbing as a means of escape from life, but we shall seldom feel beauty in its substance. Those stories that involve the realities of human life, birth and death and love and hope, the search for God and the desire for immortality,—these are the beautiful stories of the world. Sometimes they may be touched with fantasy, as by Walter de la Mare; sometimes they may be shown as a part of everyday reality. But by whichever path, beauty has found her way from the heart of man to the heart of man.

Although starkly realistic fiction may not be beautiful in content, it may well appeal to the æsthetic sense through the beauty of the presentation of even a sordid and unlovely theme. The harmonies and rhythms of good prose, the charm of phrase, the fitness of diction, the vividness of imagery may satisfy the highest requirements of the art of imaginative expression. And when these beauties of verbal style are linked with the beauties of content, as, for instance, in the work of Olive Shreiner, we have a book to which we can truly and fully apply the word *beautiful*.

Aside from this there is little that can be said in general of the style of prose fiction. There is such a wide variety in the kinds of fiction themselves that expression

must vary widely too in order to be suitable. There is no common denominator, save that of the principles of good expression in every form of writing, for the style of the poetic, fantastic novel and that of the realistic account of average life. The style will vary from author to author, from book to book, even from page to page. The demand that sometimes comes from critics that an author choose one style and keep to it, is based on a mistaken interpretation of the saying that the style is the man. Just as a man wears different clothes on his body and different expressions on his face at different occasions, so his style may and should differ in response to the changes in his material. And yet he should always give the impression that the style fits him and his material, just as his clothes must fit and be becoming and his expression must be suitable. If the occasion calls for beauty and adornment, beauty and adornment there must be; if for sober simplicity, the expression must be soberly simple. Even mannered writing has its place, as in those charming though not great fantasies in the eighteenth century mode by Elinor Wylie. Great eccentricity, however, is to be looked on askance, as tending to obstruct rather than facilitate the transmission of experience. Shoddy and careless the style of prose fiction should never be, nor trite and conventional and commonplace. For fiction is one mode of conveying to the reader a special kind of experience that the writer has had and has considered valuable; and the critic is right to stamp as poor writing any story in which the verbal expression does not measure up to the value of the content. The expression should be chosen with the greatest care that it may be worthy of the precious thing it is to carry. We do not wish the pearl of great price set carelessly in brass or tin. As Mr. Lewisohn said, the form of literature springs from the same source as the sub-

stance. It is out of the experience of the "man speaking to men" who is the artist, that the novel or the short story is born. It is from his personality directly that we get the message, and what we get from content or form is dependent—partly, to be sure, on our own receptivity, but—largely on what he puts of himself into that message. Said Brunetière, "Quelle que soit la formule, il n'y a jamais au fond des oeuvres que ce que les hommes y mettent." ¹⁴

¹⁴ *Le Roman Naturaliste* (Paris, Calmann Lévy, 1893), p. 78.

CHAPTER X

OTHER FORMS OF LITERARY PROSE

THE genius of the novelist is creative, that of the biographer, historian, or essayist, interpretative, whether of real people, of actual events, or of ideas. It is obvious however, that these other forms of prose have a definite relationship to fiction. The purpose of biography is to make a character live for its readers, and it uses the method of narrative; the aim of history is to make real the deeds of men, past or present; the appeal of the informal essay is often, like that of fiction, to the emotions of the reader, and it may sometimes take a narrative form. Likewise, the informal essay, in its subjectivity, has some relationship to poetry, the critical essay is often partly biographical, the history may concern itself with the lives of great men, the biography may recount historical events, out of history or biography may be made a novel or a play or an epic poem. We have even had a plethora in these recent years of what are known as "fictionized biographies," a hybrid form which perhaps has worked harm to true biography. Yet, in spite of these interrelations, which suggest the impossibility of drawing hard and fast lines between the various kinds of writing, there is sufficient individuality in biography as a whole, or historiography as a whole, or the essay as a type, to warrant separate discussion.

To many people, people of strong sympathies and keen pleasure in actuality, biography is more interesting than

fiction. Biography is rich in human interest. Just as we often find our greatest pleasure in fiction in the characters, so we may turn to biography feeling that here is the most human of all the forms of writing. "*Homo sum,*" said Terence in the *Heauton Timoroumenos*; "*humani nihil a me alienum puto.*" Pope declared that "the proper study of mankind is man." And Carlyle, in his essay on *Biography*, quotes this line from the *Essay on Man* and then expands the idea:

'Man is perennially interesting to man; nay if we look strictly to it, there is nothing else interesting.' How inexpressibly comfortable to know our fellow-creature; to see into him, understand his goings-forth, decipher the whole heart of his mystery: nay, not only to see into him, but even to see out of him, to view the world altogether as he views it; so that we can theoretically construe him, and could almost practically personate him; and do now thoroughly discern both what manner of man he is, and what manner of thing he has got to work on and live on!

It has often been said that old people enjoy biography more than do the young. The generalization finds some support in the nature of biography. It is usually the record of mature achievement, and as such may be more completely appreciated by those who have themselves reached maturity. The same thing is true of some novels, concerned with older people, the retrospective attitude of which would not find so responsive an audience in the young as in those of middle life. Yet experience refutes this generalization. Young people are too seldom brought into contact with biography, but when they are, they often find in it a fascination as great as that of fiction. There are so many sources of interest in biography that some one of them cannot fail to touch the youthful imagination. College freshmen have entered upon a study of biography with a dread like the fear of an untrod desert,

unknown and dry, and emerged from it with the joy of the conquest of a new realm of experience. They have found in that study the pleasure of coming to know a new person intimately; they have become fascinated by the actual events of the story, the struggles of a Serbian lad who rose from "immigrant to inventor," or of a woman battling against sordid odds for "twenty years at Hull House,"—narratives which are truly "as interesting as a novel"; or they have discovered, as in fiction, the pleasure of being introduced to a new environment; or they have had the delight of recognizing in the persons and events of the story familiar faces and facts. In short, they find that biography or autobiography is *interesting*. And it is part of the critic's business to discover whether the material in a biography has been made interesting and if so, how.

The subject of every biography should be, in himself, interesting, and worth writing about. If in the personality of a man or woman there is nothing that stirs our imagination or contributes to our mental or spiritual growth, the endeavor to set down a record of his or her life is wasted effort. Trivial and insignificant people may be made interesting by a writer of fiction. But should a biographer choose such for his subject-matter? One review of the recent biography of John Wanamaker by Herbert Adams Gibbons begins with this paragraph:

"John Wanamaker earned money for seventy-five years." That is the first sentence of the foreword of the biography of the great merchant which Herbert Adams Gibbons has just published. One is inclined to feel that it should have been the last sentence, for, except in a negative way, John Wanamaker had no other importance.¹

¹ M. R. Werner, in *Books*, Vol. III, No. 9, November 14, 1926.

The justice of this as a criticism of that particular book may be debatable. But its injustice is an irrelevant point; the comment represents a wise point of view in the criticism of biography. As we look over the great biographies in our language or in every other, we realize that it is the personality of the subject rather than his achievements that has made the book great in each case. Through his own writings, Dr. Johnson would never have attained to the high place in the estimation of the world that he has reached through his personality. And that personality is revealed to us, of course, through Boswell's great *Life*. What Boswell has done is to make a man whose personality is interesting and worth knowing real and memorable. These two adjectives are Carlyle's words; and having set forth these two qualities of reality and memorableness as the cardinal virtues of biography, he asks, in *Biography*, "How are real objects to be so seen; on what quality of observing or of style in describing, does this so intense pictorial power depend?" This is the question that the critic must answer.

He will answer first of all, as Carlyle does, "One grand, invaluable secret there is, however, which includes all the rest, and, what is comfortable, lies clearly in every man's power: *To have an open loving heart, and what follows from the possession of such!*" Sympathy truly is the great necessity of the best biography. It makes an account of a man's life and work a living record, not what William Roscoe Thayer calls a "fossil biography." If the biographer lives after his subject, even centuries after, a true sympathy will give to his book the effect of a contemporary record, the effect secured by an Eginhard or a Boswell.

Yet the person who knows him best or loves him best is not necessarily a man's best biographer. Everyone real-

izes that the widow or the son of a great man often harms rather than helps his reputation. For the good biographer, like the good novelist, is an artist, and must practice that most fundamental of all the rules of art, selection. Great love or complete familiarity may furnish the materials for a biography, but they will not necessarily make a biographer. They may blind the writer to the real character of his subject, or they may prevent him from having a sense of proportion, and from producing a balanced, symmetrical portrait. The artist selects his details in order to give the right emphasis to the true characteristics. Sometimes those details, as often in Boswell, seem to be of the most trivial nature; yet they will be found to add, even if ever so little, to our whole estimate of the man, to supplement some other detail or to furnish a counterpoise for it, or to add a new line or shade to the picture. If they do not do so, they have no place in the book.

The biographer must be, too, a man of vision, in order to see the significance of the material which he has at hand. The writer whose relationship to his subject makes him stand too close, may well find that the figure at which he is looking blots out the whole landscape; he can see nothing but that figure. The mere recorder, on the other hand, will have no sense and give no sense of the meaning and importance of a man's life. But the true biographer will realize the relationship of that life to contemporary society and to posterity. He writes, not merely an account of the prairie years of Abraham Lincoln, but an interpretation of that pioneer spirit of which Lincoln was so remarkable an illustration and which has played so large a part in American life. Thus Mr. Sandburg's life of Lincoln, even if it had no other merits, would have at least one claim to being called a good biography.

And yet, although a biographer must have a vision larger than the height or breadth or even the depth of his subject, he must never forget that his main purpose is to paint the portrait of a man or woman and not to write the history of the times in which his subject lived. He must write with that one idea in mind; and he must also write with no ulterior purpose. Froude has frequently been held up as an example of the poor biographer, largely because, in his life of Carlyle, he took the opportunity to pay off some little scores of his own on Carlyle's contemporaries. The biographer must write with no idea of settling personal disputes, and with no idea, either, of personal aggrandizement. No true biographer writes because he himself wishes to be before the public eye; he writes because he wishes to bring someone that he knows into general knowledge and recognition. When the personality of the writer intrudes too much, we begin to distrust his treatment of his subject. His personality may be very delightful and interesting, as in the case of Lytton Strachey, for example; but then we wonder whether we are being given real biography or subjective, creative writing. The greatest biographies have been written by those who have obliterated themselves. Boswell, to be sure, has disregarded the opinion of others about himself to such a degree that he has brought scorn and vituperation upon his head. But by neglecting to take any care of his own reputation, he has succeeded in giving us so much the clearer and fuller picture of the great man he worshipped. Another form of effacement is to be seen in *The Life and Letters of Walter Hines Page*.² Probably very few of the thousands who have read the book, have paid much heed to the author of it. His personality simply does not appear in its pages.

² Cf. Harvey Cushing's *Life of Osler*.

But whether a book contains something of the personality of the biographer or not, it must contain the experiences, the personality, and the achievement of the subject. From the scientific point of view, a biography must be an accurate account of the events of a man's life, and we have a right to expect and demand exactness of record. It is necessary that the biographer, like the historian, should study carefully and in a true scientific spirit all the available records and sources of information. The "life" must be a full account, minimizing nothing that needs emphasis, never distorting for the sake of grinding a private axe in the way of prejudice or picturesque effect or idealization. An impartial and judicial attitude is the foundation of the good biography. But, more than history, or than science, the biography must be infused with the feeling and the interpretation of the writer. It is this infusion which often makes of biography creative literature.

Whether the events of a person's life should be presented chronologically or not, is a question that cannot be answered dogmatically. Early biographers were not necessarily chronological in form. Plutarch's *Lives* are arranged by topics rather than by years. With the recent stress on development, on the relation of cause and effect, and the shift of interest from external manifestations of character to internal analysis, there has been a tendency to feel that the chronological arrangement is better. It gives an opportunity to study the influence of heredity and of environment in the development of a character. The same considerations that have produced in fiction the biographical and the "stream-of-consciousness" novels, have influenced biography toward the chronological structure. And yet, to take an instance in autobiography, we have an illustration of the other method of presenta-

tion in Mark Twain's *Autobiography*. Whatever the structure may be, however, the whole account will be focussed on one thing, the presentation of personality.

Yet a biography must not be merely an account of the physical events of a man's life, and a character sketch. In addition, it must take notice of a man's achievement, which is a part and a very large part of him. If lack of accuracy in the recording of events tends to make a romance, or a "fictionized biography," if lack of character study makes a record in *Who's Who*, it is also true that the absence of any estimate of achievement makes a narrative,—possibly a novel—but no biography. An illustration of the effects of this last omission is to be found in M. Maurois' *Ariel*, a delightful account of the man Shelley, but no biography of the poet. It disregards his poetry almost entirely. This important criticism and estimate of a man's achievement should not be reserved for a separate chapter at the close of a book. The narrative and critical parts of a biography should be so closely fused that it will be evident that external events and personal accomplishment unite to make the man. The good biographer must be an artist and must handle his material with an artist's care and skill. We do not want from him the kind of biography which Lytton Strachey describes:

Those two fat volumes, with which it is our custom to commemorate the dead—who does not know them, with their ill-digested masses of material, their slipshod style, their tone of tedious panegyric, their lamentable lack of selection, of detachment, of design? They are as familiar as the *cortège* of the undertaker, and wear the same air of slow, funereal barbarism. One is tempted to suppose, of some of them, that they were composed by that functionary, as the final item of his job.³

³From *Eminent Victorians*, by Lytton Strachey (New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons), pp. vi-vii. Used by permission of the publishers.

Mr. Strachey speaks here of slipshod style. The style of biography, like that of all writing, should never be slipshod; that goes without saying. But it must be said that the cardinal virtue of style in the writing of biography is simplicity. We are, by the very nature of the case, to see the character through the account. The style of the account, therefore, must be limpid. Any striving for effect, any tricks of style, any elaboration in writing, will cloud the surface and mar the transparency of the medium. If to this simplicity and clarity can be added beauty without spoiling the clarity, so much the better. But the main concern of the biographer is to realize that he is holding up the glass to a very special bit of human nature, and that the accuracy and the clearness and the completeness of the reflection are his peculiar care. If he keeps his mirror bright, his method may be what he wills, old or new, that of the story teller or that of the psychologist. If he is a great biographer, his will be a magic mirror, and having once caught the image, it will hold it for the delight and inspiration of many generations.

Something must be said too of the various forms of autobiography,—letters, diaries, memoirs, and the personal account of one's own life. We read them for the pleasure of getting in touch with a new personality, just as we read biography. But the difference lies in the fact that we feel the contact in autobiography both in the content of the book and in the style itself. William Roscoe Thayer says, "We appraise an autobiography by its representative value and by its literary expression."⁴

Of these forms, the most egotistical is the autobiography which has been written for publication. A man must tread carefully indeed if he is to avoid the charge of conceit. And not all great autobiographers have es-

⁴ *The Art of Biography*, p. 79.

caped this charge. The life of Benvenuto Cellini stands as witness to this statement. But the very egotism of the man is part of the fascination of his story. We read with amazed interest in the kind of man who could write in that way of himself, as well as with absorption in the society which he pictures. The egotism of the autobiographer is something like that of the poet, who bares his personality to us in a lyric poem. The autobiography is as subjective as a sonnet. And, as in the case of the poem, we demand from autobiography values of literary expression other than mere simplicity and clarity. The interest of a man's life (and, if he is to write of it, his life must be interesting) must be matched by the fitness and the charm of his style.

Memoirs, which are usually written for the purpose of telling of the experiences and environment, the friends and other contemporaries of the writer, rather than of revealing his own personality, are apt to be less egocentric than the autobiography. We look, in them, for charm of style and for the interest we can find in the figure of the writer. But we look too for liveliness of anecdote about other people, and for the richness of background that gives to us a sense of having actually lived in the midst of a group of interesting men and women.

In reading published letters we experience even more of this sense of being a part of the social group that is represented. Letters are far more personal than memoirs or autobiography, and each reader is apt to put himself into the place of the recipient. Thus he gets an intimate and vivid impression of the personality of his correspondent. Since letters were not written to be published, we expect them to be spontaneous and natural, as they should be when addressed to a single friend. We desire

the same richness of content, in ideas and feelings and incidents and personality, as we look for in the forms of autobiography that are prepared for the press. But in addition we expect spontaneity. Unfortunately, too many great men have written with the expectation that some day their letters would be published. Pope even is said to have altered his for this purpose. In her delightful little sketch, *The Walpole Beauty*, E. Barrington makes the aristocratic and sprightly lady who is writing of the Walpole family say of "Horry" and his letters, "You know all he writes is writ with one eye on the paper and one on posterity, so 'tis no wonder if he squints a little by times."⁵ The best letter writer never squints. Professor Thayer says that the letters of Byron are the most spontaneous and natural in the language. If this be so, be it said parenthetically, it is something to be set down on the credit side of his page over against the almost continuous pose which he takes in his poetry. All the charm of spontaneous expression added to delightful humor and serious expression of valuable thoughts on life and literature are to be found in the letters of Lamb and of Keats. Sometimes letters seem almost too intimate to have been published. They were intended for the recipient alone, and should have been kept from the public gaze. Keats' letters to Fanny Brawne and the Brownings' correspondence with each other make us feel that we are intruding upon privacy. Yet, indelicate as we feel, we are loth to relinquish the hold they give us on the personality of the writers.

Most intimate and personal of all the forms of autobiography is the diary. If it is a real diary, it is intended for the writer's eye only. It is a form of self-expression that is often indulged in for sentimental reasons, by those

⁵ "*The Ladies*!" (Atlantic Monthly Press, [1922]), p. 174.

who have nothing of importance to record and little power of recording. But there have been great diaries. It was for his own satisfaction only that Pepys recorded himself, his vanities and absurdities, his ambitions and hopes, his practical good sense. He had no intention of setting down for posterity the best and most intimate account of seventeenth century society that ever was written, or of revealing his own personality. He did not foresee Mr. Smith, the patient unraveller of his cipher. It is just this unconsciousness of an audience which adds the final charm to those other delights of revelation of personality and description of environment, all of which make letters and diaries the most fascinating kind of reading.

Like the biographer, the historiographer is using actual fact as his material. Less often than the biographer, however, does he produce literature. If the distinguishing mark of literature is the expression of the appeal to the emotions, then the ideal history is not literature. For the ideal historian has the impartial judicial attitude of the scientist, presenting evidence, weighing it, and drawing conclusions. It is in the drawing of conclusions that the historian often falls short of the impossible ideal. He may find it difficult to avoid bias even in the presentation of material. There is a general feeling, expressed more or less frequently, that it is almost impossible for the historian to write dispassionately if he is to be anything more than a recording instrument. But the more emotional he becomes, the less he is of an historian, the more of a creative writer. Personal bias and feeling lead to distortion, omission, and even falsifying of facts. Judged by the standards of scientific historiography, Macaulay and Carlyle are not good historians. Yet if we are to include

historiography in literature, we shall be inclined to condone some lapses from the ideal judicial attitude and welcome the emotion, even the partisanship of the writer. And the spirit may be true, even if the data are not. Read Carlyle's account of the twelfth of July, 1789, and then the account by Shailer Mathews, who is known as a good historian.⁶ There is no question that Carlyle moves us more, excites us more, and makes us feel more keenly the spirit of a revolting nation. Mr. John Fortescue, talking of the writing of history, says,

Now the rules of the scientific school, in banning literary art, unquestionably tend to make history dull. . . . Now why should not human nature in . . . documents be made a pleasure to the reader by the help of literary art? There is no occasion to distort or falsify recorded facts or to invent new ones. Good sound material abounds for him who has the knowledge to interpret it, and the literary skill to make it acceptable. We are told, and rightly told, that it is of the first importance to the nation and to the world that every citizen should study history and study it intelligently. Why, in the mistaken name of science, should we make the task unpleasing to him? It is by no means certain that by the scientific method we get any closer to the truth than by the literary method.⁷

And M. Jusserand wrote, "History is not simply an art nor simply a science; . . . it participates in the nature of both."⁸

Biased history has been defended even for educational purposes. *The Saturday Review of Literature* for August 7, 1926, commenting editorially on Mr. Stanley Baldwin's address before the meeting of English and American historians at King's College, said,

⁶ Carlyle, Thomas, *The French Revolution*, Part I, Book V, Chapter 4; Mathews, Shailer, *The French Revolution* (Longmans, Green & Co., 1901), pp. 128-129.

⁷ Fortescue, John, *The Writing of History*, pp. 41-43.

⁸ Jusserand, etc., *The Writing of History*, p. 3.

Set before a child a compendium of historical data, admirably devoid of all personal bias, and consequently in all likelihood without the quickness of enthusiasm that is bred in the heat of advocacy or hostility, and you are apt to leave him cold to history. But present him with that same history, vitalized by the strong sap of admiration or hatred, and he will in all probability respond to it with lively interest. You will have made a reader of history, even though you have not made a historian. You will have persuaded him that history is of the stuff of his daily living, envisaged though it be through a gap of years, and that the figures of history are no lay models but men and women moved by the same loves, and hates, and ambitions that spur on the personalities of his day. A little bias, a little partisanship go a long way to make the past live.

Suggesting imagination as the force which will both save the truth of "biased" history and energize it, the writer continued:

The historian's imagination, indeed, is in this different from the poet's, that whereas the poet's builds on the basis of reality an ideal world, the historian's in projecting itself out of the present must evolve a real one. This world it evolves must be clothed in the garments of fact, and yet if it is to be more than inanimate data, it must be invested with spirit, and color, and movement. . . . What makes history moving, and inspiring, and tragic, is exactly the measure of relation between its aspirations and its realizations.

What makes it fascinating is such presentation as depicts the development of political society as a continuous evolution, proceeding not without disaster and agony, not without pitiful backslidings, but nevertheless with majesty. Imagination ranges further than emotion. History that is written with imagination will be biased, perhaps, but not partisan, for its bias will be not for an individual or a cause, but for mankind and the march of humanity. It will have the compulsion of passionate enthusiasm without its distortions. It will have the virtues of biased history without its dangers.

This imagination, however, is not merely that which recreates the past; it is interpretative as well. It is this

imagination which inspires the work of Thucydides and of Tacitus and of other great historians. For historical writing, if we are to call it both historiography and literature, must combine the virtues of both: the judicial attitude must be vitalized by feeling and imagination; and feeling must be controlled and held in check both by the judicial attitude and by a sympathetic imaginative interpretation of the facts. In the best historiography the judicial attitude will perhaps be ascendant, but not in its meridian. In its hot dry noon it would burn up all the beauty and the literary interest that are to be found in the history of the human race.

It might be said that of all the forms of prose, the essay is the most various. Since the time of Montaigne, who was the first to name his scattered observations on men and matters *Essais*, or trials, there have been no specifications for subject-matter or treatment in this delightful kind of writing. Especially is this true of the informal or familiar essay, which may go the whole round of creation for its themes and may be humorous or pathetic, satiric or tender, provided it be familiar. Under the heading of the formal essay come various types, the number and variety of which are another indication of the range of which the essay is capable. There is the essay which is historical or biographical in nature, like those of Macaulay; these will be found to conform to the standards for the two types of writing to which they belong. There is the religious or philosophical essay, or the moral essay, or the critical, or the instructive. In each one of these forms the main purpose is to appeal to the intellect. They must, therefore, be clear in thought and expression, logical in arrangement, valuable for the ideas, the ideals, or the information which they contain. They may be of

very great literary value, exemplifying the values of both content and form, as the essays of Bacon, Macaulay, Carlyle, Arnold, Lowell, and Emerson, not to speak of some of our contemporary essayists, attest. They may stir in us not only an intellectual but an emotional response as well. Their ethical value may be very high. And they may demand of the writer and the reader a wide range of imaginative power, the imagination of the biographer or historian, of the constructor or interpreter. The essayist must have the faculty of selection of material and detail. And even in expression the formal essay may vie at times with the best artistic prose. An essay on art or literature by Ruskin or Pater will be as full of the power of imagery and beauty of phrase even as poetry. Take this passage, for instance, from Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, which is, in effect, a series of essays on art:

Stand upon the peak of some isolated mountain at daybreak, when the night mists first rise from off the plains, and watch their white and lake-like fields as they float in level bays and winding gulfs about the islanded summits of the lower hills, untouched yet by more than dawn, colder and more quiet than a windless sea under the moon of midnight; watch when the first sunbeam is sent upon the silver channels, how the foam of their undulating surface parts and passes away; and down under their depths the glittering city and green pasture lie like Atlantis, between the white paths of winding rivers; the flakes of light falling every moment faster and broader among the starry spires, as the wreathed surges break and vanish above them, and the confused crests and ridges of the dark hills shorten their gray shadows upon the plains.*

But more artistic than the formal essay, and, from a stylistic point of view, more difficult to write well, is the type of essay which is variously called informal, familiar,

*Part II, Section III, Chapter 4.

or personal. The names which are given to it suggest its nature and its requirements. It has no formal purpose or formal structure. Its aim is not to make us more learned but to make us happier. This it does by choosing for its subject-matter all sorts of familiar things, ears, or roast pig, or bed-books and night-lights, or lying in bed on cold mornings. Often they are things that have for us a multitude of associations, humorous or pathetic, so that our emotions are stirred by the very title of the essay. But the secret of the charm of a familiar essay lies in the fact that familiar things are not treated in obvious fashion. They may be viewed from a new angle, which gives us all the pleasure of the unexpected. Or they may lead on to other matters of greater significance, whether humorous or serious. The writer is a friend who is talking to us familiarly from his armchair about familiar matters. But his is no trite and trivial talk; it is interesting and wise. He may be speaking of a coquette's heart, but he is really making profound observations on society. He may be telling of his early delight in silver pencil cases with a movable almanac at the butt end, or in Skelt's Juvenile Drama, but that is only an excuse for reflections on the psychology of children. He may be calling up for you his dream children and talking of their little mannerisms, but through them he is baring to you his heart. For the familiar essay is intensely subjective, and we give it the name personal essay in recognition of this fact. The personality of that friend in the armchair is ours if we will but be ready listeners. No matter how various the topics on which he talks, we can recognize the authentic voice of the man we have come to know and love. There is no form of writing, perhaps, which so quickly wins the affections as the familiar essay. We soon know and love the gentle reserve and the kindly satire of Addison, the deli-

cious absurdity of A. A. Milne, and perhaps most of all the whimsicality of Lamb.

Discursiveness is usually a characteristic of the informal essay. It is informal in the sense that it lacks the firm outward structure of the critical or historical essay. Orlo Williams speaks of "the one habit essential to an essayist, that of discursive reflection upon men and manners."¹⁰ The essayist, like the conversationalist, is free to turn down any fascinating little side-paths that open out of his reflections, or to linger in the pleasant broad spaces with no concern for the necessity of reaching the end of the road. If our conversation gets nowhere, what matter? The informal essayist is the true literary super-tramp. And the reader must share his vagrant spirit; never must he apply the standards of railroad schedules and stated times for meals. He must go his journey with a man like Hazlitt (even though Hazlitt would refuse his company),—Hazlitt who said, "The soul of a journey is liberty, perfect liberty, to think, feel, do just as one pleases."¹¹ Yet with all the outward informality, there is, in a good essay, a firm unified structure which demonstrates that it is not an accident but a work of art. "A good essay," wrote Richard Middleton, "should start and end in a moment as long as eternity; it should have the apparent aimlessness of life, and, like life, it should have its secret purpose."¹²

The familiar essay is usually marked by humor. In the humorous treatment of even serious subjects lies a large share of the charm of the type. Lamb is certainly serious in voicing his opinion of the essential nobility of human nature and the value of even a chimney sweep. But his serious social message is not treated solemnly,—or at

¹⁰ *The Essay*, p. 5.

¹¹ *On Going a Journey*.

¹² "The Decay of the Essay," in *Monologues*, p. 16.

least only with mock solemnity. He sets his little sweeps in the tops of chimneys, like preachers in their pulpits; he plays with the idea of the sweep who came down the wrong chimney and went to sleep in the nobleman's bed. Of course he can write a piece of sheer whimsy, as in the *Dissertation on Roast Pig*, where we want no message other than the gastronomical. Or, at the other extreme, he can write an essay of pure tenderness like *Dream Children*, in which the pathos is only thrown into high relief by the slight whimsical touches.

The chief characteristic of the good familiar essay is that almost indefinable thing which we call charm,—charm of idea and feeling, charm of style. The style is that of our wise and interesting friend, leisurely, graceful, rich in suggestion, personal and familiar. Familiar style, Hazlitt tells us, is the most difficult to use. But when it is well used, it exerts that charm, it casts a spell over the willing reader that binds him to return again and again. If ever one is tempted to become an impressionistic critic, it is when he is sitting opposite the arm-chair of Charles Lamb or some of his lesser comrades. Then the soul, like that of Anatole France, goes adventuring among masterpieces.

CHAPTER XI

D R A M A

THE criticism of drama resembles in many respects the criticism of fiction. It must concern itself in both cases with the plot, the setting, the characters, and the style. But there is, at the same time, the fundamental difference that is implied in the definition of drama. The very word *drama* itself means action, and no story should be put into dramatic form intended for the stage which does not move forward by means of action. Laurence Housman tried to dramatize the *Crito* and the *Phædo*, calling his play *The Death of Socrates*. But, as one reviewer justly remarked,

except for the last moment, in which Socrates actually meets death, the scene is not fundamentally dramatic. Its greatness depends altogether upon philosophic utterances, and that is not enough for the stage. . . . The argument on the immortality of the soul would probably be tedious if it were spoken, and if the play is not spoken, but read, one would do better to turn to its greater prototype.¹

Authorities generally have agreed upon the necessity for action or struggle, and have found in it the distinguishing characteristic of dramatic literature. They have called it by various names—action, struggle, conflict, crisis, the human will attacking obstacles. The focus of this recent discussion is Brunetière's famous formulation of "the law of the drama" in 1894. "In drama or farce,"

¹ Lenore G. Marshall in *New York Herald-Tribune Books*, March 21, 1926.

he said, "what we ask of the theater, is the spectacle of a *will* striving towards a goal, and conscious of the means which it employs."² In its endeavor to reach the goal, this will encounters obstacles "opposed to it by destiny, fortune, or circumstances."³ "The general law of the theater is defined by the action of a will conscious of itself; and the dramatic species are distinguished by the nature of the obstacles encountered by this will."⁴ Mr. William Archer takes exception to this statement of dramatic law, saying,

Conflict is *one* of the most dramatic elements in life, and . . . many dramas—perhaps most—do, as a matter of fact, turn upon strife of one sort or another. But it is clearly an error to make conflict indispensable to drama.⁵

After offering numerous examples, taken from both ancient and modern drama, in which he claims that the element of conflict is not present, he states his definition:

The essence of drama is *crisis*. A play is a more or less rapidly-developing crisis in destiny or circumstance, and a dramatic scene is a crisis within a crisis.⁶

Replying to this argument, Mr. Henry Arthur Jones points out that it is possible to reconcile the statements of Mr. Archer with those of Brunetière, and that in the crises which, Mr. Archer claims, are the dramatic features of the plays he lists, there is actually a struggle or conflict of will, lying often under the surface of events, but none the less truly there. He concludes:

² *The Law of the Drama*, tr. by P. M. Hayden (Dramatic Museum of Columbia University, 1914), reprinted in Clark, *European Theories of the Drama*. See p. 407.

³ *Études Critiques*. (Quoted by Archer, *Play-Making*, p. 23.)

⁴ *The Law of the Drama*. (See Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 408.)

⁵ *Play-Making*, p. 25.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

Drama arises when any person or persons in a play are consciously or unconsciously 'up against' some antagonistic person or circumstance, or fortune. . . . Drama arises thus, and continues when or till the person or persons are aware of the obstacle; it is sustained so long as we watch the reaction physical, mental, or spiritual, of the person or persons to the opposing person, or circumstance, or fortune.⁷

This seems a full statement of the characteristic which, in the opinion of these critics, serves to mark off drama from the novel. But prose fiction may be and often is truly dramatic in this sense, presenting a struggle or a conflict. Such a conflict, say the dramatic critics, is not of the essence of fiction. Yet it was taught, certainly, for many years, in courses and manuals on the art of the short story, that struggle is an essential element of plot. Of prose fiction Bliss Perry says,

Plot in its simplest form may concern itself with nothing more than the progress of a single character and its development and experiences at the different stages of its career. . . . Usually, however, the plot of a story involves at least two characters. They embody different forces, different ways of facing and fighting the world of circumstance with which they are brought into collision.⁸

And Mrs. Wharton speaks of

the theory of the superficial critics that life in fiction must be presented either as conflict or as character.

The so-called novel of character, even in less than the most powerful hands, does not, of course, preclude situation in the sense of a dramatic clash.⁹

Later she makes her point more specific:

Even the novel of character and manners can never be without situation, that is, without some sort of climax caused by the con-

⁷ Introduction to Brunetière's *The Law of the Drama*. (See Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 469.)

⁸ *A Study of Prose Fiction*, pp. 132-133.

⁹ *The Writing of Fiction*, p. 137.

tending forces engaged. The conflict, the shock of forces, is latent in every attempt to detach a fragment of human experience and transpose it in terms of art, that is, of completion.²⁰

Indeed, it is difficult to find, even among the latest "stream-of-consciousness" novels, one in which the story does not rest upon conflict of some sort, the "reaction physical, mental, or spiritual, of the person or persons to the opposing person, or circumstance, or fortune." Just as Mr. Jones discovers the struggle underlying the events of the plays which Mr. Archer uses as illustrations of the lack of conflict, so it is possible to find that same element in almost every novel. If the overwhelming majority of novels contain this element of conflict, are we justified in calling it the distinguishing mark of drama? It is reasonable to assert that it is the most important element in drama, and that it is usually more sharply defined and more strongly emphasized in the drama than in the novel, and that the struggle is apt to be more conscious in the former. But we can scarcely say that it is the characteristic that sets drama off from all other forms of literature. Professor George Pierce Baker, stating that action is the most important consideration in a play, and that its purpose is to excite emotion, defines drama as follows:

Drama, then, is presentation of an individual or group of individuals so as to move an audience to responsive emotion of the kind desired by the dramatist and to the amount required.²¹

So far the definition might apply, except for the word *audience*, to any form of literature that tells a story or represents human life. But Professor Baker continues:

This response must be gained under the conditions which a dramatist finds or develops in a theatre.²²

²⁰ *The Writing of Fiction*, p. 143.

²¹ *Dramatic Technique*, pp. 45-46.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

What are those conditions? The answer to that question will give the true distinction between drama and other forms of narrative. Mr. Archer, in an expansive moment, writes,

The only really valid definition of the dramatic is: Any representation of imaginary personages which is capable of interesting an average audience assembled in a theater.²²

It is evident, then, that, just as there is a tendency today toward a breaking down of distinctions between the kinds of prose fiction, so there is a tendency to destroy the barriers between the different types of writing. The drama even seems to be taking over some of the material and some of the technique of the novel, as is illustrated in Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*. "Something there is," in literature, "that does not love a wall." Yet, although this is true, it is possible to make some distinction between the two forms of writing. In large measure that distinction is a matter of treatment, not of material. Novelist and dramatist might conceivably make use of the same fundamental plot, but they would handle it in different ways. The emotional response of an audience, says Professor Baker, "must be gained under the conditions which a dramatist finds or develops in a theatre." We return, then, to the question: what are those conditions? They are three in number: the necessity for condensation and concentration of the material; the restriction to dialogue and movement as the media of expression; and the adaptability of the material to stage representation.

In the first place, the play is ordinarily shorter than the novel. Consequently there is required of the playwright greater condensation of the story and sharper con-

²² *Play-Making*, p. 38.

centration on the central struggle or conflict. The dramatist must focus the attention of his audience upon the conscious effort of the protagonist of his story to attain a goal and upon the clash between his will and the obstacles that stand in the way of that attainment. Thus will he rouse the responsive emotion that he desires. The playwright may not use all the material that is open to the novelist,—all the wealth of incident that may go to make up the plot of the novel, all the description and analysis, all the personal comment and philosophizing in which the genius of the novelist may expand. Although we have chronicle plays and biographical plays, these are still the exceptions rather than the rule, and the dramatist rarely goes back, even in the biographical play, to the birth of his protagonist for the beginning of his story. What may happen in the future no man can tell: it is possible that the barriers may be still further broken down between the literary *genres*. But for the past and the present, concentration is an important distinguishing mark of the drama.

Secondly, the dramatist is restricted not only in the length of what he writes; he is also restricted in the medium through which he can tell his story. He can use only dialogue and movement. Here is a form of writing which contains no narrative on the part of the author, in which there is no question between the omniscient point of view or the single; the audience,—or the readers—who are the potential critics of the play, know every character who appears, and know about him nothing but what he reveals of himself or others tell about him. In the stage play, this revelation comes through speech, facial expression, and action. But after all, everything but the words he says is due to the actor's own interpretation of the speeches which the dramatist sets down. There are, of

course, the elaborate and often delightful stage directions of a Barrie or a Shaw. But their plays could be presented without the help of those stage directions, simply on the basis of the dialogue itself. The dialogue of a well constructed and well written play tells the story and portrays the characters; and the style of the dialogue is the style of the play.

It is the dialogue, therefore, that the critic studies. Through it he is studying plot and characters also. All the problems about the nature of the agents of the drama, their motives and their actions, even, to some extent, about the setting against which they are seen, are answered by an appeal to the words they speak. Since the dialogue carries so heavy a burden, it must be constructed with extreme care. Every word must give to the reader or the hearer the impression that it has been chosen for a special purpose. Since the play is relatively more condensed than the novel, there is less excuse for words that do not fulfill a very definite function. There is no chance for the dramatist to explain to the audience in his own person the motive for a speech or the effect it has upon others, to describe the gesture that accompanies it, the facial expression or the vocal intonation that gives it meaning. All these duties must be performed by the dialogue itself, and performed so adequately that the reader may not mistake the meaning nor the actor misinterpret the lines for the audience. Yet every speech must be natural. It must be the outcome, not only of the character who speaks it but also of the situation in which he finds himself. There must be no forcing of the dialogue to do expository duty. It must also be in itself interesting: there is little chance of pardon for dullness in the lines of a play, save when the dullness of speech of a dull person is interesting because it supplies the humor or is ser-

viceable in the understanding of plot or character. These are the requirements for all dialogue. There will be additional demands upon the style of those plays which we call poetic, whether they are written in verse or not. We shall also expect to find in it the grace and the beauty of poetry or of poetic prose.

But no play that consists merely of interesting, clear, useful, natural, concise, or even witty or poetic conversation can succeed permanently on the stage. It may succeed as a written play. There is a difference between what is known as closet drama, drama intended only to be read, and plays designed for oral presentation. Shelley's *Cenci* has qualities other than those of his *Prometheus Unbound*. Closet drama may well be narrative, or lyrical, or even argumentative in its nature. It is a hybrid form of literature. Some closet drama was never intended by its writers for the stage; the form of the play was chosen for convenience, perhaps, or for some other non-dramatic reason. Some plays, intended by their authors for oral presentation, have become closet drama perforce, because they lack those qualities which would make them truly dramatic. Perhaps the concentration upon the central struggle and the focussing of that conflict is not sufficiently sharp to interest and move an audience; perhaps the dialogue and the movement suggested by it are not sufficiently revealing of plot and character, although the dialogue may in itself be readable and interesting; perhaps the play is not adapted for stage representation.

The appeal of a play that is witnessed on the stage comes far more through the eye than does that of a closet drama or of any work of literature that is intended only to be read. The truly dramatic scenes in great stage plays are meant to be watched. A large share of the pleasure that comes to the reader of Shakespearian plays comes

through his powers of visualizing the scene as he reads it. And his pleasure in reading is enhanced after witnessing an adequate performance on the stage. Thereafter he can see the stage pictures and the stage action with greater vividness, and the speeches take on new meaning. The humorous scenes in *The Merry Wives* or in *Twelfth Night*, the tragic scenes in *Othello* or in *Lear* do not attain their full power over us until we behold them before the eye or visualize them clearly in the mind. Much of the humor would drop out of the final baiting of Falstaff in *The Merry Wives*, much of the suspense out of the episode of the screen in *The School for Scandal*, much of the tragedy out of the mad wise talk of Lear and Edgar and the Fool on the storm swept heath, if we could not see with the physical or the mind's eye the picture and the action.

But action and stage pictures are not ends in themselves, except in mere spectacle. They are a means to the rousing of the emotions of the audience. To the struggle, physical or not, of the characters upon the stage, the spectator responds emotionally. Sometimes he will feel himself quite outside the little world of the stage, but an interested and absorbed observer of it. Such is the case of the spectator who involuntarily calls out to warn the victim of the approaching murderer. More often, however, he will not only sympathize with, he will empathize in the experiences of the characters. His emotions will follow those expressed upon the stage in speech, act, and gesture, and there will be an actual motor response on his part to the movements of those before him, into whose beings he has, for the time, been absorbed. It may be a very complex kind of empathizing, for each character in turn may call forth a response. The emotional experience may thus be very intense and very exhausting.

Yet it should not be so intense—nor will it be in great drama—as to crowd out all intellectual or ethical response. It is through his ability to make the spectator put himself inside the skins of the characters that the artist speaks to the mind or touches the moral sense. Plays have often been used for propaganda, more often, perhaps, than novels, because they may have a more direct and living appeal through the speech and actions of real people, moving before the eyes of the audience. The place of propaganda in dramatic literature has been hotly debated. Of tragedy Aristotle said that its purpose was that of arousing the emotions of pity and fear in an audience so as to purge off those two emotions. Dryden said that a play ought to be “a just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind.”¹⁴ In modern times, dramatists like Shaw and Andreyev, to cite two examples, have urged a “theater of ideas.” But on the other hand, the man who called Mr. Shaw “the polyfaddistic impossibilist,” Henry Arthur Jones, in an article a few years ago in the *Daily Telegraph*,¹⁵ a London conservative paper, said, “The first and chief aim of any play—be it revue, pantomime, musical comedy, drama, comedy, or tragedy—should be to interest or amuse.” But at the end of the same article he wrote,

Is, then, the drama forbidden to teach? Do *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* teach us nothing? Yes, the drama should teach, indeed it cannot avoid teaching—either good or evil. But the drama should teach, not openly and directly by preachments and proclamations and propaganda, but as nature teaches—silently, indirectly, implicitly; by action, not by words; with potent but unseen influ-

¹⁴ *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*.

¹⁵ November 8, 1923. Reprinted in *Living Age*, Jan. 12, 1924.

ence and occult, far-removed results. The drama should slyly, obliquely insinuate lessons in the science which most of all we are concerned to learn—the science of wise living.

That is, as was said in Chapter IV, the drama may teach, but its teaching must never overshadow its other values. This happens too often in the plays of Mr. Shaw and Mr. Galsworthy, the latter of whom fails at times either to please or to instruct; moral purpose becomes a liability. On the other hand, it may be a decided asset: it may be a strong unifying force, as frequently in the work of Ibsen. Also it may give to a play a lasting influence. For although mere entertainment may be very delightful, the serious-minded theater-goer demands from the stage some more permanent values. The absurdity of farce and the excitement of melodrama will soon pass; the effect of great drama will remain in the form of a greater knowledge of human motives and actions, truer sympathies, higher ideals. Yet, if this teaching is not done unobtrusively, the effect on the play and on the accomplishment of its purpose will be ill. If character and action are warped to fit the text, then the influence of the sermon will be short-lived. Only when we realize that we are looking at a representation of life, only when we are strongly moved by the contemplation of human actions, do we carry away permanent lessons. In other words, the emotional value of a play must never be obscured by its intellectual or ethical purpose. If it is, as in, for instance, Mr. Galsworthy's *The Eldest Son*,¹⁶ or Mr. Pollock's *The Fool*, it will soon drag the moral down to oblivion with it.

Mr. Jones makes the point also in the same article that the play of propaganda, even when it is well done, will

¹⁶ Mr. Galsworthy's theory is better than some of his practice. See "Some Platitudes Concerning Drama," in *The Inn of Tranquillity*.

have no real and permanent effect upon society. "Mr. Galsworthy's interesting, sincere, and deeply moving play, *Strife*," he takes as an example. "Unfortunately," he says, "it has had so little effect that since its production strikes have enormously increased." Mr. Galsworthy probably never expected his one play to counteract all the forces that are working for the continuance of strikes; the most that he could hope for was that it would start some people thinking. And since it is a "deeply moving play," it has probably done so. The actual influence of a play like that it is impossible to measure. If the message is of merely temporary importance, the propaganda play will be soon outdated, especially if it depends chiefly on its propaganda. And although we may recognize the presence and the importance of a "theater of ideas," we must also realize that the drama cannot emphasize the intellectual as heavily as can the novel. No audience will sit patiently to hear a lecture of two and a half hours' duration, no matter how brilliant the speaker may be. A play which depends largely on the significance of its ideas or even upon the wit of its dialogue, like some of Oscar Wilde's, will hold an audience with difficulty. Yet since the days of the Greeks, playwrights have been using the stage to present their ideas on the reform of politics, morals, and art, and some of their efforts have lasted. *The Frogs* and *Patience* still delight.

The structure or architecture of a play is highly significant in its effect upon the imagination, the thought, and particularly the emotions of the audience. The unity of the plot, the careful handling of the opening scenes, of the development of the story, of the climax, and of the concluding scenes are very important in conveying emotion. Plot, language, and characters are all vehicles in which the feelings of author and dramatis personæ are

carried across the footlights or out of the pages of a book to spectator or reader.

Of the unity of plot, much has already been said in the chapter on imaginative construction. Unity and harmony of parts are requirements of all great art, ancient and modern. Yet the means by which this unity is secured may differ. The Greek dramatist, influenced partly by theatrical requirements, observed the three unities very carefully. Shakespeare, partly because of the freedom of his period and partly because the bare Elizabethan stage set no bounds of time or space, daffed the unities aside and bade them pass. Yet he secured unity, not by a single plot nor by restricting his action to one day and to one spot of earth, but, as the Greeks did themselves, after all, by treating, though with manifold variations, of one theme. For the essential unity of the Greek drama depended not upon form but upon substance. The modern stage frequently follows fairly closely the requirements for unity of time, place, and action. Almost as frequently, perhaps, the unities are violated. But there is a general recognition of the wisdom of concentration, and the mechanical limitations of even the modern stage make many characters, many scenes, and long stretches of time difficult to present. When a modern producer stages a play by Shakespeare, unless he has unlimited means at his disposal, he either attempts to approximate the Elizabethan manner of production on a bare stage or in front of a single set, or he greatly condenses and simplifies the play. The tendency toward simplification in the writing of plays is part of the general direction in which modern art has been going. We have already noticed it in connection with the plots of novels. But I venture to suggest also, with Dryden, that it is easier to write a play that observes the unities than one with the infinite

variety of a *Hamlet* or a *Merchant of Venice*. There were giants in those Elizabethan days; they could hold more in the hollow of one hand than any even of the tall men who have followed.

As we study the construction of the play, this question of unity will present itself for consideration more than once. For it depends upon the setting of a single tone and the emphasizing of the central characters and the dominant purpose of the play in the opening acts; in the middle scenes, upon the inevitability of movement toward the climax without unnecessary or irrelevant detail, and upon the skillful focussing of attention upon the climax and the harmonizing of stage picture with the emotional crisis; and in the final scenes upon the avoidance of anything to mar the climax and, as in the first act, the maintaining of the emphasis upon the dominant tone, purpose, and characters. In discussing characters and dialogue, also, we shall have to ask, among other things, whether there are any unnecessary people upon the stage and whether those who belong there make any unnecessary speeches. It is in these ways that we see the application of this principle of unity, fundamental to all art, to the special form of the drama.

Every author knows the importance of the opening scene, even of the opening lines, and every critic should look for faults and virtues in the first act. Unfortunately some modern playwrights, feeling it necessary to leave some time for the confusion due to late comers in the theater to die down, have put little significance into the opening speeches of their plays. But in most good plays the dialogue is significant from the very beginning.

In the first place, the opening scene or act serves to give information in regard to the setting, the characters, and the events which have preceded the rising of the cur-

tain. That information must be clear and adequate, and it must not be redundant or forced. Pinero, a true master craftsman, makes every word tell at the opening of his *Letty*. He prefixes to the first act elaborate stage directions, describing an unusually complicated setting. Yet all the necessary information about that setting may be derived from the opening dialogue. Clayton Hamilton says, "Meticulous students of the text will notice that this difficult exposition . . . is delivered to the audience completely before seventeen words have been spoken on the stage."¹⁷ The words that are spoken in the first few minutes of the play reveal much not only about the setting but also about the characters and the story. The information given is clear and adequate; the reader or spectator has no questions to ask. And there are no wasted words; there is no speech that does not serve some very definite purpose in the exposition. Yet every speech is as natural as if Pinero had been reporting an actual conversation. The emphasis is always placed upon the two main characters, yet they are never exploited at the expense of reality. As in life, so in the play a Marion or a Hilda may actually have more to say at a given time than a Letty. Contrast with this the opening dialogue of *The Great Divide*, where Polly is made to say something that she would never have said in real life, so that the audience may realize the reason for Ruth's presence and attitude and even her relationship to Phil:

Do you really mean to say that apart from your pride in helping your brother, making the project go, and saving the family fortunes, you really *enjoy* yourself here?

The speech fairly bristles with information, and the question should be totally unnecessary to one who had been

¹⁷ *The Social Plays of Arthur Wing Pinero*, edited by Clayton Hamilton (4 vols., E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1919), Vol. III, p. 16.

living with Ruth, her sister-in-law, for three months. It sounds like the query of a new acquaintance.

Not only do the opening speeches give all the necessary information; they also set the tone of the play, a very important part of the exposition. No tragedy by Shakespeare ever begins with a comic scene. Moreover, the emphasis is placed in the beginning of the play upon the dominant motive or purpose and upon the principal characters. In *Hamlet*, the ghost appears almost at once; in *Othello*, the hatred of Iago is evident in his opening words; in *Henry IV*, the opposition between the Prince and Hotspur is suggested in the first scene by the words of the King; in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Beatrice's wit flashes out in her very first words at the expense of Benedict. In *Letty*, the tone of the play is set by the references to Letty, and the correct emphasis is given by the first two words, "Mr. Letchmere," a name in itself suggestive, and in the early linking of Letty's name with Nevill's. The happy ending (if one can call it really happy),—at least the saving of Letty—is prepared for by Nevill's words to his sister Florence, words that are returned to with telling effect in the climax:

The family record is monotonous reading. You'll be the first to vary it—for how many generations? And—who knows!—the spell once broken—Old Nick once kicked on the shins—once—! ²⁸

With even greater conciseness is the exposition given in a one-act play, where it is necessary that all the significant information be presented in a few minutes. This is done in the opening speeches of Mr. O'Neill's *Ile*, before the main characters appear on the scene. Although the exposition is not so concise, comparatively speaking,

²⁸ From *The Social Plays of Pinero*, Vol. III, published by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.

as in *Letty*, it takes only twenty-five speeches, some of them mere exclamations, to tell the audience the circumstances of the voyage, to show how Captain Keeney is regarded in the fo'c'stle, to hint at the coming mutiny and at the tragic fate toward which the Captain is driving his gentle wife.

"How is your second act?" is a question that may well be asked by the critic. When the playwright has set forth the necessary information in his opening scenes, he must then bend every energy to the making of each incident and each speech lead nearer to the climax. Pinero's care in the construction of his second, third, and fourth acts is clear. Everything must point toward the climax of the play, at the end of the fourth act, the saving of Letty's honor. Is this salvation to come from her or from Letchmere? Obviously, if we are not to have the conventional character of the reformed rake, and if we are to have drama and not melodrama, it must come from both of them. For this point Pinero prepares most carefully. In the first act we have learned of Letty's love of a good time, of her poverty, of her love of Nevill, and of her ill health. All these matters are very skillfully woven together. Her sickness is largely due to undernourishment, for, as Marion says, she has been putting every penny on her back since she has known Nevill. And the every penny includes those that she has borrowed from friends who are scarcely less poor than she. For the sake of her health she must stop working and take a long holiday. Where is the money to come from? She cannot borrow more from the three young men,—indeed, she must pay back what she owes them. Marion's savings might send her to a small boarding house in a seaside resort, but the luxury-loving girl, with her dreams of marriage to Nevill, cannot endure the thought of a poor girl's holiday. What

more natural, then, than that, in the recoil after she learns that Letchmere is married, she should accept the vulgarity of Mr. Mandeville, who offers her "Troo-veal." It is just as inevitable that she should recoil in turn from his vulgarity, which comes to a height in the scene at the restaurant, and should be willing to give herself to Letchmere. Thus Letty is brought up to the climax. And every detail about Nevill brings him to the same point. The fact that the Letchmeres are "rotten bad" is emphasized from the first. It is obvious that he has been keeping Letty ignorant of the fact that he is married; it is only Mr. Mandeville's challenge that makes him tell her the truth. His passion shows itself in the kiss at the end of the first act; his weakness is revealed in his failure to stay with his sister. We are sure that he must yield to his desire for Letty; it seems, as he says, inevitable that he shall bring her to him. Yet in Letty's essential innocence and purity (she had never let a man kiss her before), and in the better side of Letchmere's character, shown in his sincere love for his sister and his tenderness toward Letty, are the seeds of the strength that enables them both to "kick old Nick on the shins—once."

Even the tiniest details are used for a definite purpose. The intimacy upon which the two are entering is suggested by Letty's changing her shoes and taking down her hair. These acts are made natural by the rain through which she has come from the cab to the door. Her shoes are wet and uncomfortable, and Letchmere brings her a pair of slippers to put on; her hair, he discovers by accident, is wet, and she shakes it down around her shoulders to let it dry. The heavy shower is a normal accompaniment of a hot summer day (and the heat was "planted" in order to make Letty's faint seem natural). And Letty got wet because of her characteristic insistence on leav-

ing the cab around the corner and walking the half a square or so to Letchmere's rooms through the downpour. It would be possible to enumerate many more instances of "planting," or preparation by means of detail. The resultant effect is one of remarkable and unforced unity.

The climax is skillfully handled. The passage that includes it is very brief. And as there is nothing in the play before the climax which does not lead up to it, so in the fourth act nothing follows to mar its effect. The stage picture is in harmony with the emotional crisis. Nevill absorbed in the tragedy of his sister, taking out picture after picture of her; then Letty hastily pulling on her wet shoes and twisting up her hair,—these two figures stand out single in their final struggle. There is nothing in speech or action or setting to distract the attention of audience or reader from the man and the woman. As Nevill finishes repeating what he said to his sister earlier in the day, Letty begins her preparations for departure. Nevill walks across to her.

Nevill. What are you doing? What are you doing?

Letty. Now's the time—*now*. If you saved me—! Ah, do!

Nevill. Don't be absurd, Letty. Letty, don't be absurd. You've misunderstood me. I was speaking of what another might be capable of. It would be rather late in the day for *me* to play the saint! No, no; leave your hat alone. Don't be absurd. Sit down. (After a pause) You are making yourself ridiculous. Take those things off again. Sit down.

Letty. Mr. Letchmere. . . . Now's your time . . . be good to me . . . save a woman . . . *once* . . . !

Nevill. Well—you may go back to your lodgings.

Letty. Ah—!

Nevill. I—I'll change my coat and see you to your door.

Letty. No, no; don't stir. Stay where you are; don't come with me. Don't let us—risk—²⁸

²⁸ From *The Social Plays of Pinero*, Vol. III, published by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.

Although the preparation for it is longer, the end itself comes as swiftly as in a one-act play. Compare it with the ironic climax in *Ile*:

Keeney. Annie! Did you hear him? I'll git the ile. I know you're foolin' me, Annie. You ain't out of your mind—be you? I'll git the ile now right enough—jest a little while longer, Annie—then we'll turn hom'ard. I can't turn back now, you see that, don't ye? I've got to git the ile. Answer me! You ain't mad, be you?

Mate. All ready sir. . . . Comin', sir?

Keeney. Aye.²⁰

In the one-act play the climax closes the drama, or else there is only a speech or two to follow it. Usually in a full length play the climax comes at the end of the penultimate act, and there is an act of resolution to follow. In *Letty*, the climax comes at the end of the fourth act, and the resolution is put into the form of an epilogue. This epilogue has been severely criticised. It represents Letty, two and a half years later, married to Perry, the little photographer, who has grown prosperous as he deserves. Letty is comfortable and—happy? Yes, she is happy except when she comes into contact with Nevill. He appears at the shop, a physical wreck, accompanying his sister Florence, who is to be photographed. The epilogue seems to some critics to have been written, like the last chapter of *The Marble Faun*, in response to a request to know what becomes of the characters of the story. It has been called unnecessary and sentimental,—an anticlimax, a tacked-on moral about the rewards of the good and the punishment of the wicked. But Pinero is an artist. The chances are that he had some purpose other than that of mere information in writing this fifth

²⁰ The stage directions have been purposely omitted in both these quotations in order to show how much is conveyed in the dialogue itself and to concentrate the reader's attention on the words.

act. Although the epilogue might have been condensed, the meeting of Nevill and Letty seems to justify its existence. For at the end Nevill, pointing to Ordish, who is assisting in the photographer's shop, says,

Why, *he* is an old acquaintance of mine too!

Letty. Yes—Jimmy Ordish. And Marion is down-stairs, in the shop. Marion—!

Nevill. You forget no one.

Letty. No—I forget no one.²¹

Here is the quiet resolution of the play which shows that the outcome, although it is a comfortable one, is not entirely happy.

There is little of surprise here. Letty's fate and Letchmere's are the inevitable result of their characters. In fact, these are real people, not puppets; everything they do and say is the direct outcome of their natures; the story grows out of the characters, not the characters out of the story. It would belie Nevill's character to have him turn virtuous after the climax. And it would belie Letty's to have her drown herself or fling herself away again on Mandeville or his kind. A lesser artist might have used one of these solutions. As Dryden says, the dagger and the cup of poison are always ready. Shaw gives us no epilogue to *Candida* to answer our questions, but if he had, he would not have taken that ready and easy way. Like Letty, Marchbanks did not drown himself.

Another play, very interesting for its use of characters to make reasonable the events of the story is *Mr. Pim Passes By*, by A. A. Milne. Mr. Milne, like Barrie, writes the most delightful stage directions possible, and it is in the opening one that he suggests the characters of Olivia and George:

²¹ From *The Social Plays of Pinero*, Vol. III, published by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.

The morning-room at Marden House (Buckinghamshire) decided more than a hundred years ago that it was all right, and has not bothered about itself since. Visitors to the house have called the result such different adjectives as "mellow," "old-fashioned," "charming"—even "baronial" and "antique"; but nobody ever said it was "exciting." Sometimes OLIVIA wants it to be more exciting, and last week she let herself go over some new curtains. At present they are folded up and waiting for her; she still has the rings to put on. It is obvious that the curtains alone will overdo the excitement; they will have to be harmonised with a new carpet and cushions. OLIVIA has her eye on just the things, but one has to go carefully with GEORGE. What was good enough for his great-great-grandfather is good enough for him. However, we can trust OLIVIA to see him through it, although it may take time.²²

Here are conservatism and (be it said with all due respect and affection for George) a certain stupidity, set over against a nimble wit and liberalism with a tendency (partly jocose) toward radicalism. These characteristics are continued throughout the play, with the curtains to emphasize them,—the curtains which take on almost the guise of an additional character. But more significant still is the manner in which these characteristics are made to determine the course of the plot. To the house of Mr. and Mrs. Marden,—George and Olivia—comes gentle, muddle-headed Mr. Pim, seeking a letter of introduction. He encounters Dinah, George's niece, an altogether delicious and absurd young person, who confides in him (quite in accordance with her character) the details of the family history. Olivia, it seems, had been married before, to a scoundrel named Telworthy, whom she had left in Australia, and whose death she had seen reported in the papers six years ago. While George is writing the letter, Mr. Pim talks with Olivia. He tells of meeting on the boat a man whom he used to employ in Sidney, "a bad fellow,

²² This and the succeeding quotations from *Mr. Pim Passes By* are from *Second Plays* by A. A. Milne (Knopf, 1926).

I'm afraid, Mrs. Marden . . . now what *was* his name? A very unusual one. Began with a—*a* T, I think." And then, a moment later, "I've got it! Telworthy!" With this announcement, the plot begins to move, for George and Olivia do not see matters in the same way.

George. Yes, yes, I'm not blaming you, Olivia, but what are we going to do, that's the question, what are we going to do? My God, it's horrible! You've never been married to me at all! You don't seem to understand.

Olivia. It is a little difficult to realise. You see, it doesn't seem to have made any difference to our happiness.

George. No, that's what's so terrible. I mean—well, of course, we were quite innocent in the matter. But, at the same time, nothing can get over the fact that we—we had no right to—to be happy.

Olivia. Would you rather we had been miserable?

George. You're Telworthy's wife, that's what you don't seem to understand. You're Telworthy's wife. You—er—forgive me, Olivia, but it's the horrible truth—you committed bigamy when you married me. Bigamy!

Olivia. It is an ugly word, isn't it?

And George finally sums up his argument and his emotion:

If there were any other way! Olivia, what *can* I do? It is the only way, isn't it? All that that fellow said—of course, it sounds very well—but as things are. . . . *Is* there anything in marriage, or isn't there? You believe that there is, don't you? You aren't one of these Socialists. Well, then, *can* we go on living together when you're another man's wife? It isn't only what people will say, but it *is* wrong, isn't it? . . . And supposing he doesn't divorce you, are we to go on living together, unmarried, for *ever*? Olivia, you seem to think that I'm just thinking of the publicity—what people will say. I'm not. I'm not. That comes in any way. But I want to do what's right, what's best. I don't mean what's best for *us*, what makes us happiest, I mean what's really best, what's rightest. What anybody else would do in my place. *I* don't know. It's so unfair. You're not my wife at all, but I want to

do what's right. . . . Oh, Olivia, Olivia, you do understand, don't you?

At this moment Mr. Pim comes back and tells them that the man he met at Marseilles choked to death there on a herring bone. Olivia, struggling with her laughter, cries, "A herring—there's something about a herring—morality depends on such little things—George, you—" And George, with a sigh of thankfulness, says, "Well! This is wonderful news, Aunt Julia." "Most providential!" she responds. "You understand, of course, that you are not married to Olivia?" But George doesn't, and is at a loss until Aunt Julia solves his perplexities by suggesting a second marriage at the Registry Office in London, and George is happy again. But he has not reckoned with Olivia's character. She demands a proposal, and, when George lumberingly complies with her "whim," says that she will think it over, but will perhaps refuse him and stay right on in the house and hang her new curtains. But again Mr. Pim passes by, this time to say to Olivia, privately, that the name was not Telworthy at all, but Polwittle. Olivia, however, keeps this new information to herself, and having, by her unwillingness to accept George, won from him approval of her curtains, a promise of a carpet and chair covers to go with them, and his consent to the marriage of his niece and her artist suitor, agrees to go up to London with him the next day and be married all over again. Dinah, left alone with Olivia, says,

And if you look at it all round—well, for all he had to say, he needn't really have come at all.

Olivia. I shouldn't quite say that, Dinah. (She stands up and shakes out the curtains.)

Dinah. I say, aren't they jolly?

Olivia. I'm so glad everybody likes them. Tell George I'm ready, will you?

Dinah. I say, is *he* going to hang them up for you?

Olivia. Well, I thought he could reach best.

And we leave George hanging the curtains.

Mr. Milne's play, as is obvious, is based on an absurd and unusual incident. But it is the characters of Olivia and George which make the play what it is. Had it been only a drama of incident, it would probably have closed with a general clearing up of the mystery when Mr. Pim remembered that the man's name was Polwittle. To the characters was due the delightful and ingenious conclusion.

This is a play of character; it is also a play of sparkling dialogue. The dialogue is always interesting, natural, clear, and serviceable, and it is witty as well. The only possible criticism is that some of the speeches of Dinah and Brian might have been omitted on the ground that they added nothing to the movement of the play. For sheer economy they might have been cut, but we should be very loth to lose them. Their cleverness makes them their own excuse for being. And if they do not further the plot, they do illuminate the characters.

To study several plays in this detail has seemed the surest way of making clear the characteristics of good dramaturgy. For these three plays, a tragedy in one act, a full length drama, and a full length comedy, it is obvious that the fundamental principles are the same. The walls between the various forms of the drama break down. "One more platitude," writes Mr. Galsworthy—

One more platitude. It is not unfashionable to pit one form of drama against another—holding up the naturalistic to the disadvantage of the epic; the epic to the belittlement of the fantastic; the fantastic to the detriment of the naturalistic. Little purpose is thus served. The essential meaning, truth, beauty, and irony of things may be revealed under all these forms. Vision over life and

human nature can be as keen and just, the revelation as true, inspiring, delight-giving, and thought-provoking, whatever fashion be employed—it is simply a question of doing it well enough to uncover the kernel of the nut. Whether the violet come from Russia, from Parma, or from England, matters little. Close by the Greek temples at Paestum there are violets that seem redder, and sweeter, than any ever seen—as though they have sprung up out of the footprints of some old pagan goddess; but under the April sun, in a Devonshire lane, the little blue scentless violets capture every bit as much of the spring. And so it is with the drama—no matter what its form—it need only be the “real thing,” need only have caught some of the precious fluids, revelation, or delight, and imprisoned them within a chalice to which we may put our lips and continually drink.²³

That is, in every form of drama, as in all literature, the experience of the artist must be worth expressing: it must have value,—ethical, intellectual, and, most of all, emotional. As in fiction, that experience must take the form of a story which shall delight and absorb through sheer narrative interest. As in fiction, the characters must be real and interesting. But more than in fiction, more than in any other type of literature, that experience, though large in itself, must be capable of condensation into a highly unified structure. Above all, for the stage play, it must require representation in action and in stage picture in order to attain to its full effect. And it must be expressed in dialogue that shall be clear, natural, concise, serviceable, and interesting. In it, too, may be that beauty which may also belong to fiction—beauty of idea or theme, beauty of character, beauty of style.

Yet, in spite of the possibility of formulating principles that will apply to all plays, the definitions of the different types of drama—tragedy, comedy, drama or tragi-comedy, melodrama, farce—will suggest slight differences in aim, which will in turn indicate necessary and obvious

²³ *The Inn of Tranquillity*, pp. 198-199.

modifications of the critical requirements. Of even the best farce, for instance, of which the chief object is to excite laughter, we cannot demand the same significance of theme, truth of character portrayal, or nobility of purpose as we expect to find in a tragedy or comedy by Shakespeare. Nor can we judge confessed melodrama by the rules which we should apply to a play which is not characterized by sensational incident and exaggerated appeal to the emotions.

Modifications in critical standards will result also from an acceptance of the theatrical conventions and an understanding of the conditions of the stage for which an individual play was written. The convention of the absence of the fourth wall, for instance, we all accept; we shall judge a comedy by Sheridan with more tolerance and understanding when we realize that the audience of his day also accepted the convention of the aside. A knowledge of the construction of the Greek or Elizabethan stage and of the conditions that governed the performance of a play in the time of Pericles or Chaucer or Elizabeth, will control our estimate of some of its externals. For although, as Aristotle said, "tragedy, like epic poetry, may produce its effect without movement or action . . . for from the mere reading of a play its quality may be seen,"²⁴ and although, as Mr. Spingarn says, "If we wish to understand dramatic literature itself, we must seek understanding in the great plays and not in the dead material out of which plays are made,"²⁵ it is true that even in the case of a Shakespeare the form of the expression of the creative impulse was determined by the nature of the stage on which his company was to act his plays. It is right to say that theatrical conditions do not

²⁴ *Poetics*, Chapter 26 (Bywater's translation).

²⁵ *Creative Criticism*, p. 95.

determine the inner values of that experience of human life which the dramatist is expressing. But it is absurd to claim that the critic is not better able to appreciate those inner values if he knows something of the conventions that determined the form of that expression. As well say that a man without any knowledge of the English of the fourteenth century can penetrate to the heart of the *Canterbury Tales*. The dramatic critic is prepared for his task and his delight by a study of the history of the theater.

CHAPTER XII

P O E T R Y

To some the criticism of poetry seems like a contradiction in terms. It is not possible, they say, to submit to the laws of judgment something that seems so far above all human laws. It is desecration to inquire into the workings of "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge." It is sufficient—and it is better—simply to enjoy poetry; else we may "brush the dust from off its wings." A discussion of poetry must go beyond the discussion of other forms of writing; it must penetrate to the very arcana of inspiration. It is this, perhaps, which makes the criticism of poetry seem like a profanation of the holy of holies. Yet we have a right to ask whether there be truth and that beauty which is truth in the sacred ark guarded by the priests of poetry,—whether at its heart lie the tables of the law of life. If poetry is the supreme thing in our literary experience, we must try to understand the nature of that supremacy. In so doing we shall come only to fuller enjoyment and deeper wonder.

At the very outset we meet what seems like an almost insuperable difficulty, the definition of poetry. In the first place, poetry has meant different things to different ages. The expectation of the reader who opened a book of verse in the time of Pope was very different from that of the reader in the time of Shakespeare or of Shelley or of Tennyson or of Robert Frost. Yet if we are to find an adequate definition of poetry, it must cover *The Essay on Criticism*, the Sonnets, the *Ode to the West Wind*, *In*

Memoriam, and *Mending Wall*. Then the range of subject-matter is so great that when we consider *Paradise Lost* and *The Spoon River Anthology*, *To a Skylark* and *Chicago*, we realize that obviously no definition can be based upon it. The subject-matter need not even be beautiful: Browning's mean-spirited monk, Blake's London, Burns' louse, not to mention the subways and stockyards and factories of modern poets, show that it need not. Nor can we base a definition on rhyme and meter, for such a definition would exclude the *Song of Solomon* and *Ossian* and Whitman and some of Henley and Arnold, and much contemporary work; nor on poetic ornament and exquisite diction, or we should have to say that Wordsworth and Gibson and Frost are usually no poets.

Definition means limitation. As we have just seen, the limits of poetry in length and breadth are very difficult to find. It has, we shall all agree, no upper limits; poetry may rise as high as it wishes and can. But how shall we fix the lower limit? Where is the precise point at which writing ceases to be poetry and becomes prose?

There have been many attempts at the definition or description of poetry. Most of them are unsatisfactory for one of three reasons: they are not adequate to encompass the greatness and suggest the power of poetry; or they are not exclusive of other forms of writing; or they are vague rhapsodizings that are of little service in understanding poetry. An example of the first failure is a formal definition such as Leigh Hunt's: "Poetry . . . is the utterance of a passion for truth, beauty, and power, embodying and illustrating its conceptions by imagination and fancy, and modulating its language on the principle of variety in uniformity."¹ William Allan Neilson suggests imagination, reason, a sense of fact, and intensity

¹ From *An Answer to the Question, What Is Poetry?*

as the four fundamental and essential elements, which, in proper balance, make poetry.² Although Mr. Neilson, in his discussion of intensity,³ points out the ways in which poetry differs from prose in this respect, his list of the four elements, without that explanation, might be a list of the elements in great prose. In his *Defense of Poetry*, Shelley the poet attempts to say what poetry is: "A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth." This may describe *Paradise Lost* or *Tintern Abbey* or *Chicago* or Shelley's own *Skylark*, but even if it does, it is of little help in the inquiry into the nature of poetry and the attempt to set its limits.

Having found little assistance in these three kinds of definitions, the inquirer may turn to Wordsworth, not to his familiar statement about the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling, but to that later passage in the 1800 *Preface* in which he is discussing the relationship of poetry and science. "Poetry," he says, "is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge." Now at first sight this may seem to be no more useful than Shelley's dictum. But it is suggestive of the real distinction between poetry and other forms of writing. Poetry is the sublimation of all that pertains to the human mind and spirit, the raising of imagination, reason, and the sense of fact, of emotion, thought, and words, to the highest power. It is separated from novel, drama, and essay in degree, containing the same elements as they do, but those elements exalted and intensified. If this is what intensity may mean, it certainly is the distinguishing mark of poetry. The poet, says Wordsworth, differs from other men not in kind but in degree.

All literature, as we have seen, is the expression of experience. What are the peculiarities of the poetic experi-

² *Essentials of Poetry*, Chapter I.

³ *Ibid.*, Chapter VI.

ence that set it off from that of the novelist or the dramatist? All literature may contain intellectual, ethical, and emotional values. What is the special nature of these values in poetry? In all literature the valuable experience must be selected, treated, and constructed into a whole by the imagination. Also it must be put into words that it may be transmitted to the reader. How does the poetic imagination work in the treatment and construction of the elements of experience and in the verbal expression of that experience in ways that are different from those of the imagination of novelist or dramatist? If we can answer these questions, we shall have discovered the characteristics of poetry, and shall be as ready as we ever can be to offer a definition of it.

The Greek word for poet, *ποιητής*, which we have taken over into English, means "the maker." In early times, before the development of prose literature, the poet was preeminently the maker, the creator. The Latin word for poet is *vates*, meaning also "seer" or "prophet." The two nations have suggested, by their terminology, the two-fold function of the poet. Of vision and creation is the true poet all compact; he creates, and the material out of which he creates is his seer's vision. It is this vision, intenser, more exciting, more exalting, less dependent upon the senses and the intellect than that of the writer of prose, that constitutes the poetic experience, and that sets that experience apart from that of the novelist or the dramatist. If novelist or dramatist has a vision of equal intensity, excitement, exaltation, and detachment, he straightway is a poet, and he writes as a poet and not merely as a novelist or dramatist. We may call this vision ecstasy or "psychical distance"; by such terms we recognize that it is something mystical and other-worldly. It may be a vision of everyday things, perhaps, but it will

see them in a new and different light; in that respect it is removed from ordinary experience. It sees upon the walls of Peele Castle

The light that never was, on sea or land,
The consecration, and the Poet's dream.

Aristotle said, "Hence it is that poetry demands a man with a special gift for it, or else one with a touch of madness in him; the former can easily assume the required mood, and the latter may be actually beside himself with emotion."⁴ But as the poets themselves give testimony on this point, we find that they all lay emphasis on being in an actual state of strong emotional excitement. Robert Frost said, "A complete poem is one where an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found the words." And in explanation of this he wrote, "My point is that a poem doesn't start from a good subject, but further back in a strong vague emotion. The emotion comes first. Then the emotion finds its subject or thought and the thought finds its words."⁵ Shakespeare, whom Professor Lane Cooper suggests as a poet of the first type that Aristotle mentions,⁶ notes the similarity between "the lunatic, the lover, and the poet," and speaks of "the poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling." Blake, whom many called mad, saw on the path before him a frowning thistle:

With my inward eye, 'tis an old man grey;
With my outward, a thistle across my way.⁷

That vision of the poet, though it uses and takes account of the material senses, passes through and beyond them

⁴ *Poetics*, Chapter 17 (Bywater's translation).

⁵ Quoted by permission from a personal letter.

⁶ *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry*, p. 59.

⁷ *Epistle to Thomas Butts*, "With happiness stretched across the hills."

to a realm little known to ordinary men, but half perceived by them when they stand awed in the presence of great poetry. Coleridge, telling how, at the age of eight, he first heard from his father of the names of the stars, and their size and their nature, wrote,

I heard him with a profound delight and admiration: but without the least mixture of wonder or incredulity. For from my early reading of fairy tales and genii, etc., etc., my mind had been habituated to *the Vast*, and I never regarded *my senses* in any way as the criteria of my belief.*

Emerson says of the eyes of the poet,

They overleapt the horizon's edge,
Searched with Apollo's privilege;
Through man, and woman, and sea, and star,
Saw the dance of nature forward far.⁹

Blake again wrote, in the *Introduction* to *Songs of Experience*,

Hear the voice of the Bard
Who present, past, and future sees.

A contemporary poet, Mr. John G. Neihardt, uses this figure to explain what he means by the "creative dream":

To make a crude picture of the idea, we may fancy the great mass of men as living in a valley entirely surrounded by lofty mountains. Being so long forced to act as though there were nothing beyond the mountains, most men have come to believe that nothing is real outside the valley. This is their genuine belief, the one upon which they act. . . . But as far back as valley records reach, and far beyond, no doubt, there have been variations of the valley type.

* Letter to Thomas Poole, October 16, 1797.

⁹ From "The Poet," prefixed to the essay, "The Poet," in *Essays, Second Series*. This is a different version of some lines from his unfinished poem, "The Poet."

These men, he says, climb the steeps about the valley, and then come back and undertake to tell what they have seen below them under the stars and the moon.

One of them may have viewed the valley from only a moderate height; but even from that vantage point the aspect of familiar things has changed, and new relations are perceived—relations that throw a strange light upon one's thought about one's neighbor, perhaps. Another may have ascended still farther, and from that high viewpoint other changes in the aspect of familiar things are to be recorded, for there the whole valley is seen at a glance, and things once big, grow little, and many things are merged, and much that once seemed to matter, doesn't matter. And now and then it seems that one may have stood upon a swimming peak and beheld the valley as a tiny pool of shadow in a vast of starlight, as though he had peered a moment upon an outer world.³⁰

And a contemporary Scotch poet, Mr. Hugh M'Diarmid, has well described the poetic experience in his *Ballad of the Five Senses*. He begins:

I wot there was nae sicht nor scent,
Nae savour, substance, soon',
I didna see, smell, taste, or feel
Or hear as I ga'ed roon'.

But seeking further, for interpretation as well as sensation, he finds that

Times are yin sees things as they'd ne'er
Been seen before ava',
I wot I saw things fresh and full,
As few men ever saw.

O I wist it is a bonny warl'
That lies forenenst a' men,
But it's naething but a shaddaw-show
To the warl' that I saw then.

³⁰ Neihardt, *Poetic Values*, pp. 102-104.

Then another realization comes upon him:

Yet sune I kent God or the warl'
 Were no' for een to see,
 Wi' body and saul I socht to staun'
 As in Eternity.

Oot o' the way, my senses five,
 I ken a' you can tell,
 Oot o' the way, my thochts, for noo'
 I maun face God mysel'.

That new world into which he passes, beyond the limits of his five senses and his thoughts, is like "anither kind o' star." And in conclusion he sums up the stages by which he moves to the supreme poetic experience:

O I wist it is a bonny warl'
 That lies forenenst a' men,
 And that ony man wi' his senses five
 As weel's the neist may ken.

And I wist that that is a shaddaw-show
 To the warl's that can be seen
 By men wha seek as I ha'e socht,
 And keep their senses keen.

But O I'm fain for a gowden sun,
 And fain for a flourishing tree,
 That neither men nor the Gods they'll ken
 In earth or Heaven sall see! ²¹

These last pages have been filled with quotations, because the testimony of the poets themselves, old or new, major or minor, as to the nature of the poetic experience is more valuable than any analysis by one of the "practical" inhabitants of Mr. Neihardt's valley can be. When a poet speaks thus, we listen to him, and we feel that his vision of the nature of his own vision is something truly poetic.

²¹ From *Sangschaw* (Blackwood, 1925), pp. 43-52.

In the very moment of his vision, the poet becomes intensely aware of the significance of his experience. That significance lies in the experience itself, not in what he can in future do with that experience. Poetry is less allied with purpose and with the intention of accomplishing a certain end than any other form of writing. Didactic poetry there is, but the poetry does not lie in the didacticism. Spenser's expressed purpose of forming a gentleman had no part in his poetic experience. It was his vision of Faery Lond, with its "greatest glorious queene" and its gentle knights that made poetry out of a conduct book. In that vision he was aware of certain values,—a truth that stimulated his intellect, an ethical significance that enlarged his moral outlook, a view of life that stirred him to healthy and fine emotions. These values, this significance that came so personally to him out of his own intense experience, he was driven to express and share with others. But the realization that he could use his experience to teach men what pertains to the gentleman was no part of his initial sense of its significance.

In this point the poet differs from the novelist or the playwright. The latter write to express their experience, it is true, but their experience has not that same intensity and detachment from the practical which belongs to the poetic experience, that ecstatic and mystical quality. That is, it has not if they are merely novelists or playwrights; if it does take on that other-worldliness, then, though they may still be writing in prose, they are poets. The most practical people, whose judgment on æsthetic matters, though not always to be trusted, is sometimes suggestive, will see sound, practical meaning in what the novelist or the playwright is trying to tell them, but will dismiss the poet as a little mad. The same kinds of values are to be found in them all, both in the experience and

in the expression of it, but the practical people will be inclined to say that stories and plays are written for the sake of what they have to say, and what they will accomplish for their readers, and that poetry is written for the sake of the poetry. For the cry of "Art for Art's sake!" and the protest against literature with a purpose are more often voiced by the makers and lovers of poetry than by those who practice or foster any other form of writing. Poetry, like beauty, is its own excuse for being.

Yet it is clear that great poetry has the greatest of significance for its readers. As soon as the moment of intense vision has passed, and the poet prepares to express his experience, he must have a realization, not only of the significance of that experience to himself but also of its value to others. And he will take pains so to employ his imagination in treating and interpreting, in constructing and putting into words what he has seen as to make clear to others its meaning. He must represent, that others may have some share in it, his vision. His work has just begun. The poet's eye ceases to roll in frenzy, and he becomes the careful artist, still inspired, but no longer in the rare atmosphere of the mountain top.

For his experience does not become poetry until it is translated into a form that will make it intelligible to others. And this translation is the part of the whole process of poetic composition which we can most easily study. Before the poetic vision we can only stand in wonder; the significance of that vision to the poet himself we accept; but the manner of expressing that significant vision we can study and analyze. We are still on holy ground, and we will take our shoes from off our feet and tread softly; but we can approach the marvel of the burning bush and examine it and see in its branches, flaming but unconsumed, the evidence of God's presence.

When the moment of vision has passed, the poet prepares to express his experience. First he must find a symbol for it that will represent it to those who approach that ecstasy only through his help. Sometimes the symbol will be directly connected with the experience itself and need not be sought. The poet has had his vision as he listened to the nightingale or the skylark, or looked upon Mont Blanc or a little colt left out in the snow, or read an old yellow book or the romance of Tristram. Inevitably, then, these matters all being within the possible experience of the reader, they are the symbols which the poet will use. But the mere contemplation of an object which may, to a poet, be a symbol of "a precious seeing," will not necessarily result in a poem. Many verses have been written about birds and animals and mountains and romantic love that show no sign of the seer's vision. The bush is a perfectly ordinary bush, in whose branches there is not the tiniest spark of divine fire. The volumes even of our good poets are marred by stanzas written to or about a person or a sunset or a tree or a flower or a bird simply because it offered itself as a poetic subject, not at all because it was for the moment the glass through which a poet had seen truth.

Not always are experience and symbol so closely allied, however, as to make the use of that very symbol immediately inevitable. Sometimes the experience comes as an emotion or a thought for which a symbol must be found in order to make it concrete. When the symbol is adequate, it is often difficult to tell how far it was separated from the vision; the vision and that which represents it seem truly to have been born together. Sometimes, however, it is easy to see that the thought or feeling must have come first and grown articulate only after the symbol was found. Such is the case in the last

two lines of the familiar quatrain by Landor, written on his seventy-fifth birthday:

I strove with none, for none was worth my strife;
Nature I loved, and next to Nature, Art;
I warmed both hands before the fire of life,—
It sinks, and I am ready to depart.

In poorer poetry, the effect is often that of a long and not always successful search after a symbol for what may have been a genuine vision. The seventeenth century makers of conceits sought thus long and sometimes vainly; their uncertainty as to the exact symbols is frequently shown in a series of symbols, as in Crashaw's *The Weeper*.

These are examples of the result of the search for unusual symbols. More mediocre poets err on the side of choosing for their purpose trite symbols, symbols that have been used over and over again. They have copied those symbols from others, borrowed, not found them, failed to make them their own, and therefore failed to make them carry to the reader the conviction of an authentic experience behind them. Yet the same symbol may be used many times over and still retain its meaning and power. For each good poet may use an old symbol with such sincerity that it will carry the assurance of its rightness as a way of expressing his personal experience. The death of the flowers as significant of the death of man has a long history. "As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more," wrote the Hebrew psalmist. Herrick mourned over the passing of the daffodils; Shelley described the death of the sensitive plant; and Edith M. Thomas has written of frost in the garden. Yet no one of these poets is conventional or trite; the symbol in each

poem fulfills its purpose of representing the writer's vision.

Some modern poets believed so strongly in the value of symbols that they formed a group or school of Symbolists. Yet they were merely narrowing and treating as a discovery of their own a principle which lies at the root of much of the world's great poetry. They made a point of not explaining their symbols; the application of the symbol to human life is implicit not explicit. They were wise. Not every poet can make the application successfully, as Shakespeare does in the concluding couplet of a sonnet, for instance. And when it is badly made, as it is so often in Wordsworth, and as it surely might be most often in the work of the minor poets who belong to the modern school, it were far better omitted altogether. If the symbol is sincerely chosen, it should carry the application without explanation. If it is not well chosen, it will probably be obscure and will deserve the kind of ridicule which such work received in *Spectra*, a little book of "symbolic gibberish," a literary hoax fathered, under false names, by Arthur Davison Ficke and Witter Bynner.¹²

In an earlier chapter it was said that different poets may find different meanings in the same stimulus to their senses. That is, an object may be a symbol of one vision to one poet, and of quite another vision to a second poet. To Herrick, daffodils may be the symbol of the sadness of the brevity of life; to Wordsworth, they will represent the happiness of everlasting beauty. Wordsworth found the skylark to be

Type of the wise who soar but never roam,
True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home;

¹² *Spectra, a Book of Poetic Experiment*, by Anne Knish and Emanuel Morgan, Kennerley, 1916.

whereas to Shelley it was a "blithe spirit," an "unbodied joy." Also similar visions will find expression in different symbols. Of course, no two poetic experiences will ever be just the same. Yet even this fact is not sufficient to account for the different symbols. The imagination of each poet works independently, and finds the symbol for his personal experience which seems most nearly adequate to him. If he has had a vision of the meaning of growing old, he may choose to express that significance, as Coleridge does in *Youth and Age*, by contemplating himself and his responses to the world around him, or, as Wordsworth does, by reflecting upon the small celandine. Or he may cast the idea into the mold of three symbols, winter, evening, and the dying fire, as Shakespeare does in one of his best known sonnets. It may be a sense of unbounded power that the poet wishes to express. If he is a Shelley, he will choose the symbol of Mont Blanc, where

Power dwells apart in its tranquillity;

if a Sandburg, he will choose Chicago, "City of the Big Shoulders." The symbol for unbounded speed may be Puck putting a girdle round the earth, or the skyey speed of Shelley's west wind, or the automobile of Percy MacKaye. John Drinkwater had a vision of infinity:

SYMBOLS

I saw history in a poet's song,
In a river reach and a gallows-hill,
In a bridal bed, and a secret wrong,
In a crown of thorns: in a daffodil.

I imagined measureless time in a day,
And starry space in a wagon-road,
And the treasure of all good harvests lay
In a single seed that the sower sowed.

My garden-wind had driven and havened again
All ships that ever had gone to sea,
And I saw the glory of all dead men
In the shadow that went by the side of me.²³

Over a hundred years ago, Blake put the same vision into symbols less concrete, more mystical, but at the same time more apt:

To see a World in a grain of sand,
And a Heaven in a wild flower;
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour.²⁴

Even an individual poet may find various symbols for one bit of truth that has come to him in vision. One of the most frequent and most characteristic moods of Shelley is that of a sense of mutability. He wrote two poems of that title, saying in the first of them,

Naught may endure but Mutability.

It is this idea that we find in *Ozymandias*, in *The Cloud*, in all the floating, changing imagery which throngs his poetry. He piles up symbol after symbol of this vision in the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*. Keats discovered that beauty is eternal, and he shows that it is so through the story of Endymion, through a Grecian urn, through a nightingale, through the legend of Hyperion.

On the other hand, a poet may use throughout his work a single kind of symbol, a characteristic subject-matter that is capable of representing different visions or experiences. Browning, for example, through his "men and women" brings many a message from his mountain top, to the valley below,—messages about the meaning of that crowded, hurried life which the valley people live,

²³ From *Poems: 1908-1914*, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1918.

²⁴ From *Auguries of Innocence*.

messages about the unknown world beyond the valley boundaries. Such a poet will choose a symbol that is capable of various manifestations, such as Browning's men and women, Wordsworth's Nature, even Pope's London society. Perhaps it would be better to describe it as a subject-matter made up of many symbols, all of the same or similar kind. The poet chooses that part of the universe which he knows best or loves best and through which he in consequence sees visions of great significance; and this he uses as a symbol for the interpretation of what he has seen. Sometimes those symbols prove to be almost as difficult to understand as the vision itself. Blake has chosen symbols so strange, so foreign to our experience that we need volumes of explanation in order to attempt to understand them. Yet even the reader who is not versed in the philosophy and the symbols of that strange mystic, can get from the enormous figures of his mythology, Los and Urizen and Enitharmon, a sense of the largeness and the power of the forces of life that formed part of his ecstatic dreams, part of the world in which he seemed to live. At the other extreme may lie a poet like Wilfrid Wilson Gibson, whose interest is centered upon the lives of miners and mechanics and factory hands, in whom he sees and through whom he represents his vision of the beauty and the meaning of human life.

All this discussion about the symbols for the poetic experience, from Los and Enitharmon to Zillah Paxton and Agatha Steel,¹⁵ from the music of the spheres to the brawling of Chicago, leads to one conclusion: it is impossible to be dogmatic about the subject-matter of poetry. The critic's inquiry will be, not whether an ash-

¹⁵ See Gibson, W. W., "Agatha Steel," in *Daily Bread* (Macmillan, 1916).

can or a trolley car or a drunken sot is a fit subject for poetry, but whether the writer who has used them has chosen them as adequate symbols for a worth-while vision. No general law may be formulated as to what a poet may or may not write about. You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, to be sure, but you can conceivably make a poem out of it. The important consideration is the genuineness and the value of the poetic experience and the success of the symbol in representing that experience. And after all, this is what the critics through the centuries have meant when they said that anything was suitable material for poetry if it was poetically treated.

Having found the symbol to represent his experience, the poet, if he is to put that experience into a poem, must next determine how he will construct the embodiment of his vision. This means that he must find a form into which his symbol will fit. The metrical form will be determined by the nature of the poetic experience and of the symbol chosen to represent it. The emotion attendant upon the vision may be quickly exhausted, and leave perhaps a sonnet or an ode; it may recur again and again to build up an epic.

The critic who would really understand poetry and would adequately interpret it, must be conversant with the technical terms that belong to the art. Such knowledge is not an end in itself; it furnishes the critic with convenient means for shortening his description and discussion of poetry. It is easier to say epic or ballad or ode or sonnet than to describe them each time it is necessary to mention them. Similarly he will learn to know the meters, not that he may pedantically scan a poem, nor that he may flaunt his knowledge of amphimacers and pæons, but that he may truly realize and intelligently

discuss the way in which the poet has chosen his metrical form to suit his experience and his symbol.

The fundamentals of prosody can be simply stated. The meter of English poetry is based on the regular recurrence of accented syllables. It inherits something also from classical poetry, which was quantitative rather than accentual. That is, the proper metrical effect is secured only when the length of the syllables is given some attention as well as the accent, when there are not many short accented syllables in the line, and, more important still, not many long unaccented ones. But the scansion of poetry is worked out according to the accents, not according to the quantities. The familiar comparison of scansion to musical notation is misleading, because, with its half notes and quarter notes, it represents quantity and not accent. One of the best ways to represent the metrical form of a line of poetry is to use the letter *x* to represent the unaccented syllable and the letter *a* to represent the accented one, thus:

x a x a x a x a x a
The curfew tolls the knell of parting day.

The regular recurrence of accent that constitutes English meter takes different patterns. Each division of the line, containing one unit of the pattern, is called a foot. The commonest feet are the iambus (*xa*), the trochee (*ax*), the spondee (*aa*), the anapæst (*xxa*), and the dactyl (*axx*). There are others which are far less used and need no discussion in so brief a treatment as this, such as the pyrrhic (*xx*), the amphibrach (*xax*), the amphimacer (*axa*), the tribrach (*xxx*), and the pæon (*xxxa* or *axxx*). Coleridge's little verse may help to impress them on our memory, although he uses the terms *long* and *short*, which belong to quantitative verse:

Trochee trips from long to short;
 From long to long in solemn sort
 Slow Spōndee stalks; strong foot! yet ill able
 Ever to come up with Dactyl trisyllable.
 Iambics march from short to long;—
 With a leap and a bound the swift Anapaests thrōng.

The length of the line is measured by the number of feet or metrical units contained in it. According as it contains one, two, three, four, five, or six feet, it is called monometer, dimeter, trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter, or hexameter. The last four are the most commonly used, though some poets have liked the shorter and the longer rhythms. Tennyson uses even the nonometer in his poem *To Virgil*:

Roman Virgil, thou that singest Ilion's lofty temples robed in fire.
 The full description of a line of verse will indicate the basic foot and the number of feet. Thus the line from Gray's *Elegy* quoted above is an iambic pentameter line, and that from *To Virgil*, trochaic nonometer catalectic, the word *catalectic* meaning that the unaccented part of the last foot is omitted. Comparatively few lines of verse, however, will be perfectly regular; as was pointed out in earlier chapters, there will be many substitutions of one foot for another within a line, both for the sake of variety and for the sake of producing a definite effect. Yet, with all the variations, the basic rhythm will always, in good poetry, be strongly felt. Milton's *Paradise Lost* is written in iambic pentameter, but the scansion shows many substitutions:

a a/ a a/ x a/ x a/ x a
 Forthwith upright he rears from off the pool
 x a/ x a/ x x/ a a/ x a
 His mighty stature; on each hand the flames

$\begin{array}{cccccccc} x & x & a/ & x & a/ & x & a/ & x & a/ & x & a \\ \text{Driven backward, slope their pointing spires, and rolled} \\ x & a/x & a/ & x & x & a/ & x & a/x & a \\ \text{In billows, leave i' the midst a horrid vale.} \end{array}$

All that has been said is true of the regular meters. Free verse, which grew to such popularity some years ago, the fad for which is already waning, is a free and irregular combination of metrical units in lines of varying length, so that the accents do not recur regularly. Good free verse, however, is not prose divided up into lines. Although it shows no regular meter, it has a distinct rhythm, and the accents, though not arranged to mark feet of equal or equivalent length, make a definite pattern. In Henley's *Margaritae Sorori*, for example, the metrical unit *xaxa*, in which the second accented syllable carries a heavier stress than the first, appears again and again:

A late lark twitters from the quiet skies:
 And from the west,
 Where the sun, his day's work ended,
 Lingers as in content,
 There falls on the old, gray city
 An influence luminous and serene,
 A shining peace.

The same recurrence of a marked metrical unit is to be found in Amy Lowell's *Patterns*.

The single lines of a poem are often combined into larger units or divisions, usually called stanzas or verses. Sometimes there is no such stanzaic division, and the lines are united to form no smaller unit than the entire poem. In the more regular forms of verse, the lines are tied together according to a definite scheme. The whole poem is made up of lines that are, for example, preponderantly iambic or preponderantly dactylic. The length of the lines may vary, either regularly, as in most stanzaic

forms, such as the ballad quatrain, in which iambic tetrameter alternates with iambic trimeter, or irregularly, as in the irregular ode, or in free verse, or in those forms that approach free verse, such as Arnold uses in *Dover Beach*. Or the lines may be all of the same length, as in blank verse or the sonnet. They may be bound together into larger units of a definite number of lines and a definite line length, such as the Spenserian stanza (nine lines, of which the first eight are iambic pentameter, the last iambic hexameter), or ottava rima (eight iambic pentameter lines); or into a whole of prescribed length and metrical form, such as the sonnet (normally fourteen iambic pentameter lines), or the rondeau (fifteen lines, of which thirteen are iambic tetrameter, and the two lines of refrain iambic dimeter). Such regular combinations of lines are usually marked by a definite rhyme scheme, which helps to emphasize the pattern. The accepted method of representing the rhyme scheme is by the letters of the alphabet, each letter used representing a different rhyme, and the capital letters indicating identical rhymes and frequently the repetition of the entire line. Thus the rhyme scheme of the Shakespearian sonnet is pictured as follows: ababedcdefefgg; that of the Spenserian stanza is ababbcbcc; and that of the triolet is ABaAabAB. For instance, the rhyme words of Austin Dobson's triolet, *A Kiss*, are *to-day, to-morrow, may, to-day, way, sorrow, to-day, to-morrow*. An example of the Spenserian stanza, from James Thomson's *The Castle of Indolence*, also will show how the rhyme scheme is derived:

A pleasing land of drowsyhead it was:	a
Of dreams that wave before the half-shut eye;	b
And of gay castles in the clouds that pass,	a
Forever flushing round a summer sky.	b
There eke the soft delights, that witchingly	b
Instil a wanton sweetness through the breast,	c

And the calm pleasures, always hovered nigh; b
But whate'er smacked of 'noyance or unrest c
Was far, far off expelled from this delicious nest. c

Lines may be combined into units that are not regular and are also without rhyme, as in free verse and blank verse. In such poems, if they are of appreciable length, there is usually some division which corresponds to the division of prose into paragraphs. Sometimes the end of the metrical paragraph coincides with the end of a line, sometimes, as often in *Paradise Lost*, for example, it does not.

Meter has, except in a few instances, been insisted upon until comparatively recently as a requirement of poetry. Rhyme has never been regarded as an absolute necessity, although some periods have used it almost exclusively and many great poems in all periods have been written in rhyme. Its usefulness in binding together the lines in a metrical unit, which has been mentioned above, is its very smallest value. It frequently serves a very important purpose in emphasizing the point of the lines, as in the satire of Pope's or Dryden's heroic couplet, or the humor of Byron's ottava rima or Gilbert's stanzas. But its highest value is the æsthetic pleasure that it brings to the reader. That pleasure consists partly in the satisfaction of hearing the expected sound with just enough change to avoid monotony, partly in the aid which it gives to the rhythm, partly in the melody which it produces. It may be structurally useful or definitely decorative. There are various kinds of rhyme. The commonest is end-rhyme, in which the accented vowel and all the sounds that follow are repeated, but the consonant sound preceding the accented vowel varies. Identical rhymes, such as *pair-prepare*, though they were much used in Chaucer's day, are not now considered good. Mere asso-

nances in place of rhymes have never been considered good except by a few eccentric theorists, but they have sometimes been used by writers like Byron or Mrs. Browning, who are good poets but careless versifiers. Internal rhyme, or the use of the same sound in the middle and at the end of the line, is used with exquisitely melodious effect by poets like Shelley and Swinburne. Initial rhyme is a term sometimes used for alliteration when that device is not a mere ornament but a structural device, as in Old English poetry and in Tennyson's translation of *The Battle of Brunanburgh*:

Warriors over the
Weltering waters
Borne in the bark's-bosom,
Drew to this island:
Doomed to the death.

The same term is used for the rhyming of the first words of the lines of a poem instead of the last ones, a device infrequently used by only a few poets. Rhyme, even elaborate rhyme, need not be a restriction upon poetic genius; those who reject it in the cause of greater freedom fail to realize the charm and power and naturalness of which it is capable in the hands of a master. It is hard to say whether Arnold has written more beautiful poetry in the intricately rhymed stanzas of *The Scholar Gypsy* or the blank verse of *Sohrab and Rustum* or the free verse of *Philomela*.

Here, in very truth, is God's plenty from which the poet may choose the metrical form of his poem. All are good. The true critic should hold no brief for one form or another, for short rhythms or long, for rhyme or free verse. His duty is to find out whether the poet has chosen a form suited to express his vision and its symbol and whether he has used it with all the effectiveness and

beauty of which it is capable. It was said in the chapters on imaginative construction and imaginative expression that there are certain meters and certain verse forms and certain types of poetry that are adapted to the representation of certain subjects and the production of certain effects. The choice of the metrical form should in every case follow the vision and the choice of the symbol. No genuine poet, except for purposes of experimentation, says, "Go to, I will write a sonnet. What shall it be about?" A sonnet written under such circumstances may be a brilliant *tour de force*, but it will not, unless, by some chance, the mere act of concentration brings an authentic vision, be one of the greatest poems. It will not represent the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling." This artificiality characterizes much of the verse written in the difficult and elaborate French and Italian forms, such as the villanelle or the sestina. It is charming often, exquisitely turned and finished, but it is artificial. The fear of being artificial, of pruning the inspiration to fit the form, is one of the causes of the vogue of free verse. But (we must set aside the temptation to observe that much free verse would be the better for a little pruning) it must be clear to the critic who has read Dante that the truly great sestina, as well as the truly great poem in free verse, is not artificial; the inspiration is not lopped or stretched to fit any metrical Procrustean bed. The form fits the content perfectly, for it is made to its measure. Emerson said in *The Poet*,

For it is not metres, but a metre-making argument that makes a poem,—a thought so passionate and alive that like the spirit of a plant or an animal it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing. The thought and the form are equal in the order of time, but in the order of genesis the thought is prior to the form.

There is obviously more involved in the construction of a poem than the choice of the metrical form. Like any other literary architect, the poet must observe the principles of unity and harmony, of variety and contrast, of the logical building up of the poem to an effective culmination. These principles have been considered in their general application to all forms of literature in the chapter on imaginative construction. If a poet is writing narrative poetry, he will observe the special laws for structure that apply also to the novel or the short story; if his poem is dramatic in form, the rules of dramatic technique will govern its construction. It remains to discuss in this chapter some of the special points that pertain particularly to the construction of the lyric poem. Some of the observations that follow will obviously be applicable to other forms of poetry as well.

To some critics, like Edgar Allan Poe, the lyric has been the only kind of poetry. It is certainly, taking the whole history of poetry into consideration, the commonest type, and the earliest and the most modern. In its modern usage, the word has two connotations: lyric poetry, having been originally composed to be sung to the accompaniment of the lyre, must be musical; lyric poetry, being song, is the expression of the personal emotion of the poet. Of these two characteristics, its subjectivity especially has an important influence on the structure of the lyric poem.

Of the complete structure of the lyric poem, John Erskine says,

Speaking broadly, all successful lyrics have three parts. In the first the emotional stimulus is given—the object, the situation, or the thought from which the song arises. In the second part the emotion is developed to its utmost capacity, until as it begins to flag the intellectual element reasserts itself. In the third part the

emotion is finally resolved into a thought, a mental resolution, or an attitude.²⁸

This statement is easily illustrated by many sonnets and by such a poem as Waller's *On a Girdle*:

That which her slender waist confined
Shall now my joyful temples bind:
No monarch but would give his crown
His arms might do what this has done.

It was my Heaven's extremest sphere,
The pale which held that lovely deer.
My joy, my grief, my hope, my love
Did all within this circle move.

A narrow compass! and yet there
Dwelt all that's good, and all that's fair:
Give me but what this ribband bound,
Take all the rest the Sun goes round.

And although Mr. Erskine's rule seems too academic and arbitrary to fit the structure of all lyrics, it will be found, by the observant reader, that these three parts are implied if not actually expressed in almost every lyric poem. And it is important to notice that it is a single stimulus which gives rise to a single emotion and leads to a single thought, mental resolution, or attitude. This singleness is the chief factor which determines such laws as there are of lyric composition.

The length of the lyric poem is the first consideration. Since it is the expression of a single emotional experience, it follows that the lyric must be brief. Emotional excitement and tension cannot be sustained for very long. Poe's remarks on this point, in *The Poetic Principle*, are familiar:

That degree of excitement which would entitle a poem to be so called at all cannot be sustained throughout a composition of

²⁸ *The Elizabethan Lyric* (Columbia University Press, 1903), p. 17.

any great length. After the lapse of half an hour, at the very utmost, it flags—fails—a revulsion ensues—and then the poem is, in effect, and in fact, no longer such.

But though we may accept Poe's outer limit, we are still faced with the question: how long should a particular lyric poem be? The answer is that a lyric poem should be just long enough to suggest the stimulus, to express the emotion, and to express or suggest the concluding thought, and no longer. Conciseness is necessary. Verbosity is hard to forgive in any writing, but it is scarcely tolerable in lyric poetry. If the superfluous words come at the beginning of the poem they prevent us from entering at once fully into the mood of the poet. If they are to be found in the middle of the poem, they obstruct the clear flow of the emotion. If they are at the end, the emotion will do more than flag into the intellectual, it will disappear entirely, and that revulsion which Poe deprecates will ensue before the composition is finished. It is rarely that we find such verboseness in a lyric poem. Wordsworth is sometimes guilty of it, especially in the conclusions of his narrative poems, which he often draws out to undue length. This is true, for instance, of *The Waggoner*. In the good lyric no condensation is possible. How would it be possible to say what Landor has said in fewer words?

Your pleasures spring like daisies in the grass,
Cut down, and up again as blithe as ever:
From you, Ianthe, little troubles pass
Like little ripples down a sunny river.

Since conciseness is so important and a lyric poem must be brief, it is vital that the tone or mood of the poem, the color of the emotion that is to be expressed, be set at the very beginning. We know many lyric poems better by their first lines than by their titles. The opening words of

a sonnet or an ode often hold the very essence of the mood. Think of these lines that introduce nine familiar lyrics:

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,—

Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!—

Earth hath not anything to show more fair—

I must down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky—

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints—

Fear death? To feel the fog in my throat—

Drink to me only with thine eyes—

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean—

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree—

But the following poem violates this principle, for the opening lines, with their charming picture of cool quiet, do not prepare the reader for the anxious questioning at the last:

The rain falls calmly
Upon a cool world,
And taps the leaves
Of the oak trees,
Whose branches encircle the house.

The night-air with its green fragrance
Steps in through the open door,
The door I have left wide open;
But will she come in the rain?

She came on moon-light nights,
When the hills were rimmed with silver,
And the earth was tender and warm.
She came when the moon was like silver,
But will she come in the rain? ¹⁷

¹⁷ Thorne, David, *Thirteen. A Book of Poems* (New York, Palatine, 1923), p. 13.

The same focus upon the tone or mood of the poem must be kept throughout its course. This is necessary in order that the emotion of the reader may be sustained throughout. There must be nothing in word or sound or image to turn the attention away from the emotion that accompanied the poet's vision. And the closing lines of a lyric usually either hold that emotion suspended or bring it to a quiet resolution or conclusion. They frequently return at the close to the phrasing of the opening lines, with the effect of a refrain. Often the last lines are a summary or application of the significance of the poetic experience, as in the last two lines of a Shakespearian sonnet. Sometimes they contain not an abstract summary but a final detail which represents the height of the experience. In *Dust*, by "A. E.," the last line is the complete expression of what the poet has been saying:

I heard them in their sadness say,
 "The earth rebukes the thought of God;
 We are but embers wrapped in clay
 A little nobler than the sod."

But I have touched the lips of clay,
 Mother, thy rudest sod to me
 Is thrilled with fire of hidden day,
 And haunted by all mystery.²⁸

And W. W. Gibson's poem, *Sight*, sums up the mood and the significance of the poet's vision in the image contained in the last line:

By the lamplit stall I loitered, feasting my eyes
 On colours ripe and rich for the heart's desire—
 Tomatoes, redder than Krakatōa's fire,
 Oranges like old sunsets over Tyre,
 And apples golden-green as the glades of Paradise.

And as I lingered, lost in divine delight,
 My heart thanked God for the goodly gift of sight

²⁸ From *Collected Poems* (London, Macmillan and Co., 1915), p. 34.

And all youth's lively senses keen and quick . . .
When suddenly, behind me in the night,
I heard the tapping of a blind man's stick."

But whatever the method used to bring the reader back from the heights where he has been walking with the poet, there must be nothing in or after the summation of the emotion, as there must be nothing in or after the climax of a short story, to mar the emotional effect.

Finally, the poet must put his vision into words. He must speak so that we may understand, and as yet we are not prepared, like the inhabitants of Mr. Wells' Utopia, to comprehend thought without verbal expression. The choice of diction, therefore, is, in some respects, the most important part of the poetic process. It is clear from what has already been said that poetry does not depend upon diction alone. But the success of the final transmission of the poetic vision does depend upon the diction.

What, then, is the proper diction for poetry? We have already discussed the characteristics of good imaginative expression in general. Is there anything more to be said of the characteristics of poetic expression in particular? Some critics and poets have said that there is no difference between the language of poetry and the language of prose. Wordsworth's statement of this theory in the 1800 *Preface* is familiar: "It may be safely affirmed that there neither is, nor can be, any *essential* difference between the language of prose and metrical composition." Yet the fact remains that we regard Wordsworth as a good poet in those poems or parts of poems in which his diction has some quality that distinguishes it from prose, and as a bad poet in those poems in which he carries out his theory literally. There must be some explanation here.

Both theory and practice in regard to the diction of

²⁹ From *Borderlands and Thoroughfares* (Macmillan, 1914), p. 190.

poetry have varied. At times poets have swung very far away from the language of prose. They have used exalted language, as in the Elizabethan drama and in some of the work of the Romantic and Victorian poets. They have used words not to be found in everyday speech, like *blithe*, or archaic words, or contractions like *ne'er*. Or they have chosen to express themselves in roundabout ways, as in the eighteenth century, calling pigs "the grunting, bristly kind," or a boot "the shining leather that encas'd the limb." At other times, the diction of poetry has come very close to "the language really used by men," as in the time of Wordsworth's revolt, or in the present, which eschews *ne'er* and *blithe* and *methinks* as well as *the grunting, bristly kind*. There have been poets who have argued that the language of poetry should be vague. Dr. Johnson said that it was not the business of the poet to "number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest."²⁰ Although his Imlac was speaking mainly of the subject-matter of poetry here, the writers of the eighteenth century, as we have already seen, are vague rather than definite in their diction. And Poe wrote, "I *know* that indefinitiveness is an element of the true music—I mean of the true musical expression. Give to it any undue decision—imbue it with any very determinate tone—and you deprive it, at once, of its ethereal, its ideal, its intrinsic and essential character."²¹ And at the other extreme are the Imagists, the first article of whose creed is "To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the *exact* word, not the nearly-exact, nor the merely decorative word."²² Can we then say nothing

²⁰ *Rasselas*, Chapter X.

²¹ *Marginalia* on *Democratic Review*, December, 1844.

²² *Some Imagist Poets* (Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1915), p. vi.

definite about the diction of poetry? Must we reconcile ourselves to the idea that the theory of poetic diction changes like the fashions in clothing?

The first thing to realize is that words in themselves are neither poetic nor prosaic. Almost any word may conceivably appear in either prose or poetry.²³ Whether in its context it will be poetic or prosaic will depend upon the use to which it is put. The main principle which should determine the use of words in poetry is, as will perhaps be evident from the trend of the argument thus far, their appropriateness. Just as the symbol, whether it be a star or a mud puddle, should be the appropriate symbol to embody the poetic vision, so the word, whether it be exalted or lowly, elaborate or simple, old or new, indefinite or concrete, will be the word fitted to represent that vision through the chosen symbol.

On this ground, we might even make out a case for the poetic diction of the eighteenth century. And in spite of its patent absurdities, at times it should be defended. For the stiff, brocaded London society and the urbane minds and wits which were the symbols that Pope used for his way of looking at human nature (which, after all, is his vision of the valley, even though his stance is the foothills rather than the mountain tops)—for this subject-matter the most appropriate language may be stiff and artificial. There are times, of course, when artificiality is not appropriate, and then such diction is not poetic. A London lady of title dressed to represent a shepherdess has every right to call her sheep her "fleece care." But Cowper, that dweller in and lover of the country, has no right to speak of the farmer's pipe as "the short tube that fumes beneath the nose." Such language is merely

²³ See Lowes, *Convention and Revolt in Poetry*, Chapter V, for the best discussion in print of the diction of poetry.

imitative, not of the poetic vision itself, but of the most imitable and least worthy aspect of a great poet's work. This imitativeness is the great fault in much language that we call "poetic diction," putting the quotation marks around the phrase to indicate that the diction is not truly poetic but only so-called. It becomes conventional, stereotyped, meaningless (the unforgivable sin of language). This is true equally of the imitations of the language of Pope and those of Shelley's and of Tennyson's diction. Such phrasing is no longer the inevitably appropriate expression of the poetic experience.

Simple language, on the other hand, is suitable for the expression of simple things. Wordsworth, having chosen as his subject-matter, that is, as the symbols for his vision, rustic man and his surroundings, was straightway committed to his theory of simple diction. Yet the extreme of simple diction such as is found in *The Idiot Boy*, for example, is not appropriate, even though the subject is simple. It lacks the dignity which belongs to the great theme of the love of a mother for even an abnormal child. *Michael*, on the other hand, has both simplicity and dignity. But diction that is simple in the best sense is not appropriate to every subject. We cannot conceive of *Paradise Lost* written in the language of *We Are Seven* or of the Lucy poems or even of *Michael*. Milton's complex and magnificent world demands such words as *adamantine* and *empyrean*.

It may be said against the poetic diction of the eighteenth century that it is so vague that it does not create an image. But it is a question whether a master like Pope, using it, intended to create an image so much as to convey an idea or an atmosphere. When he wanted to create an image he could be concrete enough:

Here files of pins extend their shining rows,
Puffs, powders, patches, bibles, billet-doux.

Also, as has been said by the advocates of the indefinite in poetry, vague words are often so highly suggestive that the reader is helped by them to form his own image. And *fleecy care* is so suggestive of artificial surroundings that it brings to mind straightway a portrait by Reynolds with a pastoral background.

Now this is no brief for vagueness in the language of poetry as such. It is only a brief for appropriateness; it is also a plea for a tolerant attempt to understand an alien poetic experience expressed in language with which we are in general unsympathetic. For it is true that most great poetry is written in language that is concrete, and that most great poets have striven for concreteness. Some of Coleridge's finest effects, to be sure, are secured through vague, though highly suggestive diction. But a study of the changes in the manuscript of Keats' *Eve of St. Agnes* will show that many of his alterations were in the direction of the more exact word. For example he wrote first, in stanza xxx,

While he from forth the closet brought a heap
Of candied sweets,—

The last phrase he changed to "Of candied fruits," and then wrote, as his final draft,

Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd.

This effort after concreteness and exactness is due to the fact that poetry on the whole uses images in the attempt to represent as directly as possible the vision or the experience of the writer. Mr. Abercrombie says that the distinction between the language of prose and that of

poetry lies in the fact that poetry directly represents or imitates the experience, whereas prose describes it.²⁴ And Professor Lowes writes, "The business of words in prose is primarily to *state*; in poetry, not only to state, but also (and sometimes primarily) to *suggest*."²⁵ Such representative and suggestive language speaks largely in images. So, when a contemporary poet, speaking of the blackbird, writes,

Wet your feet, wet your feet,
This is what he seems to say,

he is using prose, not poetry, because in poetry a bird never seems to say anything, he says it. Of all the qualities that are characteristic of imaginative expression as a whole, there will be found in poetic diction a high degree especially of suggestiveness.

What of beauty of diction? The poet will usually employ all the resources which he has of rhythm, rhyme, the sound of words, the meaning of words, the connotations of words, to make his language beautiful. But its true beauty will depend upon its appropriateness, the harmony of the language with vision and symbol. Whether the subject is beautiful or not, fit and perfect expression of the experience gives beauty to the poem. Even ugly sounds will contribute to the beauty of the whole. Thus we call Shelley's *Sensitive Plant* a beautiful poem, beautifully written, although it contains the ugly stanza,—

And thistles and nettles and darnels rank,
And the dock and henbane and hemlock dank,
Stretched out its long and hollow shank,
And stifled the air till the dead wind stank.

²⁴ *The Theory of Poetry*, pp. 106-110.

²⁵ *Convention and Revolt in Poetry*, p. 181.

No one could claim that Tennyson's line in itself is beautiful,—

The bare black cliff clang'd round him—

but the line fits exquisitely into a beautiful whole. Mr. Abercrombie speaks of the poetic world as a world in which all things, even evil and ugliness, are in harmony.²⁶

Toward that poetic world of harmony, of perfect beauty, the critic's eyes are turned. In the balanced combination of all these elements that we have been discussing,—the poetic experience, the grasp of the significance of that experience, and the clothing of the experience in symbols, form, and language that will represent it—he finds poetry. And the greatness of the poetry will be proportional to the quality and significance of the vision, the rightness of the symbol, the suitability of the form, and the representative power of the language. The poetry may be in prose form: it may flash out from the pages of a novel, from the lines of a play, from the passages of an essay or biography as well as from a poem. A poem is a single unit of poetry, in which every part is poetic and every part contributes to the representation of the single lofty experience which was its inspiration.

That lofty experience may be beyond the critic's actual grasp; the lovers of poetry may be restricted in person to the world of the five senses. But in imagination and in vicarious experience they may follow the poets at least part of the way. For the world is not divided, as Mr. Neihardt would have it, into those who climb and those who never think of climbing. There are many who stand at the foot of the mountains and long to scale them, to climb even a very little way, but who have not the

²⁶ *The Theory of Poetry*, p. 215.

strength. They guess dimly at the wonders and the visions to be gained on the slopes and the heights. And they are those who most eagerly welcome the climbers and listen to their tales. For through their strong desire and their great love for the mountain of vision, they understand a little of the nature of the poetic experience, and they long to understand it better. They at least are

men wha seek as I ha'e socht,
And keep their senses keen.

Hence these lovers of poetry are the true critics of poetry. They will not fear to examine it. And in so doing they may see, even though afar off, the brightness of the gowden sun and the flourishing tree. At least they will truly

Hear the voice of the Bard
Who present, past, and future sees.

APPENDIX

CHAPTER I

EXERCISES

1. Prepare a report on one of the great critics and his contribution to criticism. Suggestions: Aristotle, Longinus, Dante, Scaliger, Sidney, Boileau, Dryden, Johnson, Voltaire, Gottsched, Lessing, Coleridge, Hazlitt, Sainte-Beuve, Goethe, Taine, Flaubert, Arnold, Schopenhauer, Poe, Lowell, A. France, de Gourmont, Shaw, Sherman, Mencken, Brandes, Croce.
2. Prepare a report on the theories of one of the contemporary schools of criticism: (a) impressionistic, (b) scientific, (c) æsthetic, (d) appreciative, (e) creative, (f) sociological, (g) psychological.
3. Do you consider the following good criticism? Give reasons for your answer.
 - (a) "Well I have finished Dora. It is a very sweet story and I like it very much. It has beautiful pictures and Dora is a very sweet little girl. I like her because she is so patient and good. The part about the children is also very nice. The evenings with her father sounded so nice and pleasant, she must have been very happy. What I don't like about the Aunt is that she cries too much she doesn't stop to think about that if she would only stop and think things over it would make her happier."—Muriel White, aged 10 years, in *Literary Review*, Nov. 15, 1924, p. 10.
 - (b) "I might, were I to select two lines, decide upon
Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.
... But probably these lines are not possessed of any extraordinary beauty in themselves; probably they are beautiful to me because they embody my whole philosophy of life. Thus in our definition of 'beautiful' we have the inescapable

- personal equation."—Mary Sinton Leitch, in *Literary Review*, July 3, 1925, p. 8.
- (c) "The Cockney School of Poetry: Keats," by Lockhart (?). See *Critical Essays of the Early Nineteenth Century*.
- (d) "To begin, then, with Shakespeare. He was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them, not laboriously, but luckily; when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too."—Dryden, *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*.
- (e) Criticisms on *Paradise Lost*, by Addison, *The Spectator*, Nos. 267, 273, 279, 285, 291, 297, 303, 309, 315, 321, 327, 333, 339, 345, 351, 357, 363, 369. See especially, "The Characters," in *Critical Essays of the XVI-XVIII Centuries*, pp. 286-291.
- (f) "Of Kings' Treasuries," in *Sesame and Lilies*, by Ruskin.
- (g) "The History of the People of Israel," by Anatole France. See *On Life and Letters*, Series II.
- (h) Any five reviews or critical essays in periodicals or in the books listed in the References.

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CHAPTER II

EXERCISES

1. Comment on the following definitions of literature:
 - (a) "Literature is the cry of the people."
 - (b) "Literature is the personal use and exercise of language."—Newman.
 - (c) "Literature consists of all the books . . . where moral truth and human passions are touched with a certain largeness, sanity, and attraction of form."—John Morley.
 - (d) "Literature is an expression of something, of experience or emotion, of the external or internal, of the man himself or something outside the man; yet it is always conceived of as an art of expression."—Spingarn.

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- (e) "Literature is the expression of life."—Woodberry.
2. What is your definition of beauty?
 3. What is the difference between prettiness and beauty: in a human face, in a piece of music, in a line of poetry?
 4. Why do you consider the following beautiful?
 - (a) A sunset
 - (b) A beautiful face
 - (c) Leonardo da Vinci's "The Last Supper"
 - (d) Schubert's "Ave Maria"
 - (e) Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*
 - (f) A rose
 5. Is there beauty in Rodin's statue of Balzac (see Cladel, *Rodin, the Man and His Art*, p. 315)? in Barlach's "Old Woman with a Stick" (see Cheney, *A Primer of Modern Art*, p. 62)? in Picasso's "Woman with a Mandolin" (*Ibid.*, p. 103)? Give your reasons.
 6. What are the qualities of a "best seller"?
 7. Find, in the files of one of the literary magazines, a list of the "best sellers" of ten years ago, of five years ago, of three years ago. How many of these books are still popular? With how many titles are you familiar?
 8. Choose one book from the list of "best sellers" for the current year, read it, and answer the following questions: To what class of readers does it appeal? What is the nature of that appeal? Do you call it literature?
 9. Can you think of any books that are "caviare to the general" that you regard as literature? any that you think are not literature?
 10. What do you, personally, expect to find in books?
 11. In what ways and to what extent is the experience expressed by the following writers universal: Homer, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Gray, Keats, Dickens, Conrad, Elinor Wylie?

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CHAPTER III

EXERCISES

1. Test the clarity of the following by paraphrasing or summarizing them: Meredith, *Modern Love*, Sonnet XIII;

Browning, *Epilogue to Asolando*; Shelley, *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*; O'Neill, *The Great God Brown*.

2. Test the logicality of the following by outlining them: Lamb, *Old China*; Wordsworth, *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*; Browning, *Saul*.
3. Are the following original in thought: Milton, *Paradise Lost*; Pope, *Essay on Criticism*; O'Neill, *The Hairy Ape*; Barrie, *Dear Brutus*?
4. What information do you get from the following books? Does this information add to or detract from your enjoyment? Bulwer Lytton, *The Last Days of Pompeii*; Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*; William Beebe, *The Arcturus Adventure*; Byron, *Childe Harold*.
5. Bring in for discussion two examples of the use of scientific fact in poetry.
6. Does the fact that the theology and cosmology of *Paradise Lost* are not generally accepted today militate against its literary value?
7. Apply the correspondence test for truth to
 - (a) Characters (e.g., Becky Sharp, Adam Bede)
 - (b) Events (e.g., *Jane Eyre*, *Treasure Island*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Mary Barton*)
 - (c) Ideas (e.g., "'Tis not what man Does which exalts him, but what he Would Do."—Browning, *Saul*).
8. Test, for consistency with "the whole body of truth as we know it," the following: Byron, *The Siege of Corinth*; the characters, good and bad, in Dickens' novels; Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*; Jules Verne, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (compare your attitude toward this book today with that which you would probably have held when it was first published).
9. Consider the truth of myths, legends, and fairy tales: the story of Pandora's box; the story of Siegfried; *The Pied Piper*; *Peter Pan*.

10. Comment on the following statements:
 - (a) "Their rank [i.e., that of the emotional forms of literature] must always depend, in great part, upon the truth they contain."—Winchester, *Some Principles of Literary Criticism*, p. 149.
 - (b) "We do not give the highest rank to anything which is not a faithful representation of this actual human life of ours as it is or as it might be."—*Ibid.*, p. 159.
11. What is your opinion of the intellectual content and value of Chinese poetry? of the work of the Imagists?
12. Discuss the intellectual value of the following and its effect upon your estimate of them: Pope, *An Essay on Man*; Elinor Wylie, *Jennifer Lorn*; Wordsworth, *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*; Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*; Coleridge, *Kubla Khan*; Lewis Carroll, *The Jabberwocky*; Noyes, *Watchers of the Sky*; Galsworthy, *The Silver Spoon*.
13. Bring in examples of humor in situation, character, and diction, and show where the incongruity lies.
14. Write a paper on the intellectual value of the work of some one author. Suggestions: Chaucer, Spenser, Dryden, Pope, Milton, Gray, Johnson, Wordsworth, Shelley, Jane Austen, George Eliot, Carlyle, Dickens, Mrs. Browning, Browning, Tennyson, Swinburne, Christina Rossetti, Meredith, Henry James, E. A. Robinson, Noyes, Frost, Gertrude Atherton, Conrad, Mark Twain, Sheridan, Stephen Leacock.

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CHAPTER IV

EXERCISES

1. List the names of as many poems, plays, and novels as you can, in addition to those given in the text, that were written with the purpose of teaching a moral lesson.
2. Consider *Piers the Plowman*, Bacon's *Essays*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *The Excursion*, *Daniel Deronda*, *Sesame and Lilies*, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, *Strife*, and answer the following questions:
 - (a) What lesson does each teach?
 - (b) Compare it, if possible, with other works that teach the same lesson.
 - (c) Is its didactic value greater or less than its other values?
 - (d) Is it impeded by its lesson from attaining its full measure of greatness? Is it helped?
3. Illustrate the way in which literature reflects variations in the social code.
4. Choose three contemporary novels or plays that have been attacked as immoral and determine whether the attacks are justified. Give your reasons.
5. What positive ethical values, if any, are to be found in the work of the following writers: Chaucer, Shakespeare,

Dryden, Burns, Coleridge, Rossetti, Jane Austen, Sterne, Shaw, Galsworthy, Frost? Consider the work of each author as a whole, and then choose one novel, play, or poem for special study. Suggestions: *Measure for Measure*, *Absalom and Achitophel*, *The Jolly Beggars*, *Kubla Khan*, *Tristram Shandy*, *Candida*.

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CHAPTER V

EXERCISES

1. Analyze, as is done in the text with *Scythe Song* and *Saturn*, the sources of emotional appeal in three lyrics of your own choosing.

2. Study the degrees of emotional appeal and the ways in which the feelings of the reader are stirred in different accounts of the Battle of Waterloo (e.g., Robertson, *C. G., England under the Hanoverians*, pp. 467-471; Hugo, *Les Misérables*, "Cosette," Book I; Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, Vol. II, Chapters 1-4; Byron, *Childe Harold*, III, stanzas 21-27), or of the Fire of London (e.g., Lingard, *The History of England . . . to 1688*, Vol. IX, pp. 127-130; Pepys, *Diary*, Sept. 2-6, 1666; Dryden, *Annus Mirabilis*, stanzas 209-290).
3. By what means is evil or pain made an "æsthetic good" in the following: *Soliloquy in a Spanish Cloister*, *Macbeth*, *The Pit and the Pendulum*, *The Cenci*, *The City of Dreadful Night*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *The Turn of the Screw*?
4. Find other illustrations than those given in the text of the presence or absence in literature of emotional validity, sincerity, strength, variety, continuity. Determine in each case whether there is artistic justification for the practice of the writer.
5. Study the poetry of the Imagists. Is the emotional effect confined to the appeal to the senses? Illustrate.
6. Write a paper on the emotional value of a novel, a drama, or a long poem. Suggestions: *The Saga of Burnt Njal*; Conrad, *The Rescue*; Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*; Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield*; Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*; *Esther*; Mrs. Gaskell, *Cranford*; Hardy, *The Return of the Native*; Ibsen, *A Doll's House*; Masfield, *The Tragedy of Nan*; Sophocles, *Antigone*; Drinkwater, *Abraham Lincoln*; Galsworthy, *Justice*; Barrie, *Mary Rose*; Pinero, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*; Dante, *The Inferno*; Keats, *Endymion*; Browning, *The Ring and the Book*; Tennyson, *The Princess*; Robinson, *Lancelot*; Masfield, *Daffodil Fields*; Job; Longfellow, *The Courtship of Miles Standish*.

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CHAPTER VI

EXERCISES

1. Examine your own experience and decide what in it would be valuable to possible readers.
2. Has all the material in the book you are now reading real value? Should any of it have been omitted?
3. Study the imaginative use of personal experience in Hamlin Garland's *A Son of the Middle Border*, Lamb's *Mackery End in Hertfordshire*, William Beebe's "Jungle Night" in *Jungle Peace*, Keats' *Sonnet on First Looking into Chapman's Homer*.
4. Study the imaginative realization of the experience of others in history (Herodotus, Macaulay's *History of England*, Woodrow Wilson's *History of the American People*) and biography (E. V. Lucas' *Life of Charles Lamb*, Lord Charnwood's *Abraham Lincoln*, Gamaliel Bradford's

Damaged Souls, Dmitri Merejkowski's *The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci*).

5. Study the creation of plot in *Hamlet*, *The Tale of Two Cities*, *Diana of the Crossways*, *Lord Jim*, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. In what sense is the plot created in each case?
6. Study the creation of character based on personal experiences (David Copperfield, Dinah Morris); on observation of others (Becky Sharp, Soames Forsyte); on history or legend (Cressida as she is pictured by Chaucer and Shakespeare, or Tristram and Isolt as they are conceived by the mediæval writers of romance, by Tennyson, by Swinburne, by E. A. Robinson).
7. Study the direct interpretation of personal experience in Burns' *To a Mouse*, Wordsworth's *My Heart Leaps Up* and *The Solitary Reaper*, Lamb's *Witches and Other Night-Fears*, E. V. Lucas' *A Funeral*.
8. Study the use of association for the purpose of interpretation in the following:

(a)

THE SPIDER

What shall I compare it to, this fantastic thing I call my Mind? To a waste-paper basket, to a sieve choked with sediment, or to a barrel full of floating froth and refuse?

No, what it is really most like is a spider's web, insecurely hung on leaves and twigs, quivering in every wind, and sprinkled with dewdrops and dead flies. And at its centre, pondering for ever the Problem of Existence, sits motionless the spider-like and uncanny Soul.

—Logan Pearsall Smith, *Trivia*. (Copyright 1917 by Doubleday, Page and Company)

(b)

Many a green isle needs must be
In the deep wide sea of misery,
Or the mariner, worn and wan,
Never thus could voyage on
Day and night, and night and day,
Drifting on his dreary way,

With the solid darkness black
 Closing round his vessel's track;
 Whilst above, the sunless sky,
 Big with clouds, hangs heavily,
 And behind the tempest fleet
 Hurries on with lightning feet,
 Riving sail, and cord, and plank,
 Till the ship has almost drank
 Death from the o'er-brimming deep,
 And sinks down, down—like that sleep
 When the dreamer seems to be
 Weltering through eternity;
 And the dim low line before
 Of a dark and distant shore
 Still recedes, as ever still,
 Longing with divided will,
 But no power to seek or shun,
 He is ever drifted on
 O'er the unreposing wave
 To the haven of the grave.

—Shelley, *Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills*,
 ll. 1-26.

- (c) This Life, which seems so fair,
 Is like a bubble blown up in the air
 By sporting children's breath,
 Who chase it everywhere
 And strive who can most motion it bequeath.
 And though it sometimes seem of its own might
 Like to an eye of gold to be fix'd there,
 And firm to hover in that empty height,
 That only is because it is so light.
 —But in that pomp it doth not long appear;
 For when 'tis most admired, in a thought,
 Because it erst was nought, it turns to nought.

—William Drummond.

9. Study the selection of detail in descriptive poetry, such as Keats' *Endymion* and Shelley's *Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills*.
10. Study the use of circumstantial detail in *Robinson Crusoe*, in Joyce's *Ulysses*, in Conan Doyle's *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.
11. Study the choice of detail in a contemporary novel.

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CHAPTER VII

EXERCISES

1. Consider the works listed below from the point of view of the suitability of their structure. Are any of them especially well or ill adapted to the literary form in which they are written? Should any be written in prose that are in poetry, or vice versa? Consider the metrical form of the poems as well as the type of poetry (drama, lyric, epic, etc.) which has been used. Byron, *Cain*, *The Vision of Judgment*; *Beowulf* (use the translation by F. B. Gummere in *The Oldest English Epic*, Macmillan, 1914); Mrs. Browning, *Aurora Leigh*; Robinson, *Lancelot*; Coleridge, *The Ancient Mariner*; Shelley, *Song: Rarely, rarely comest thou*, *The Cloud*; Browning, *Fifine at the Fair*; Dryden, *Religio Laici*, *Absalom and Achitophel*; McPherson, *Ossian*; Whitman, *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking*; Austin Dobson, *A Kiss*; Keats, *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*; Rossetti, *My Sister's Sleep*; L. P. Smith, *Trivia*; Butler, *The Way of All Flesh*.
2. Name as many writers as you can whose work illustrates the use of classic formalism. How many were consciously imitating classic models in drama and poetry?

3. Study the ways in which unity and harmony of structure are secured in the following: Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*; Shaw, *Saint Joan*; Byron, *Don Juan*; Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*; Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street*; George Kelly, *Craig's Wife*; Drinkwater, *Abraham Lincoln*; Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*; Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*.
4. Study the use of variety in the structure of the same books.
5. Study the ways in which metrical variety is secured in fifty stanzas of *The Faerie Queene*, fifty lines of *Paradise Lost*, fifty lines of Dryden's *Baucis and Philemon*.
6. Study the use of contrast for structural purposes in one of Shakespeare's plays, e.g., *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Othello*.
7. Study the logical sequence in the construction of Hugo's *Toilers of the Sea*, Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*.
8. Study the use of climax in the stories of O. Henry and Katherine Mansfield.

REFERENCES

(Same as for Chapter VI)

CHAPTER VIII

EXERCISES

1. Study the following, noting the presence of clarity, simplicity, conciseness, and precision, and analyzing the ways in which these qualities are secured: Frost, *Mending Wall*; Bacon, *Of Books*; Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, Book I.
2. Find examples of clarity, simplicity, conciseness, and precision in the work of other writers.
3. Study the effect of the auditory and articulatory images of the words in the following:

(a) Lang's *Scythe Song* (see Chapter V, p. 111).

- (b) Sister, my sister, O fleet sweet swallow,
 Thy way is long to the sun and the south;
 But I, fulfilled of my heart's desire,
 Shedding my song upon height, upon hollow,
 From tawny body and sweet small mouth
 Feed the heart of the night with fire.

—Swinburne, *Itylus*

- (c) They may utter voices through the organs of man when they dwell in human hearts, but amongst themselves is no voice nor sound; eternal silence reigns in *their* kingdoms. *They* spoke not, as they talked with Levana; *they* whispered not; *they* sang not; though oftentimes methought they *might* have sung: for I upon earth had heard their mysteries oftentimes deciphered by harp and timbrel, by dulcimer and organ.

—De Quincey, *Suspiria de Profundis*

- (d) Where the quiet-coloured end of evening smiles
 Miles and miles
 On the solitary pastures where our sheep
 Half asleep
 Tinkle homeward through the twilight, stray or stop
 As they crop.

—Browning, *Love Among the Ruins*

What associated images are suggested by the rhythm of the following?

- (a) With the flight of swallows our horses swept round every angle. Like rivers in flood wheeling round headlands, like hurricanes that ride into the secrets of forests, faster than ever light unwove the mazes of darkness, our flying equipage carried earthly passions, kindled warrior instincts, amongst the dust that lay around us.

—De Quincey, *The English Mail-Coach*

- (b) Turn, hoop,
 Burn hoop,
 Twist and twine
 Hoop of mine,
 Flash along,
 Leap along,
 Right at the sun,
 Run, hoop, run.

—Amy Lowell, *A Roxbury Garden*

- (c) I saw him once before,
As he passed by the door,
And again
The pavement stones resound
As he totters o'er the ground
With his cane.
—Holmes, *The Last Leaf*

- (d) OREAD
Whirl up, sea—
Whirl your pointed pines,
Splash your great pines
On our rocks,
Hurl your green over us,
Cover us with your pools of fir.
—"H. D."

5. What associated images are suggested by the metrical changes and the metrical form in the following?

- (a) So he with difficulty and labour hard
Moved on. With difficulty and labour he.
—Milton, *Paradise Lost*

- (b) bears, tigers, ounces, pards
Gambolled before them, the unwieldy elephant
To make them mirth used all his might.
—*Ibid.*

- (c) *Glendower*. I say the earth did shake when I was born.
Hotspur. And I say the earth was not of my mind
If you suppose as fearing you it shook.
Glendower. The heavens were all on fire, the earth did tremble.
Hotspur. O, then the earth shook to see the heavens on fire,
And not in fear of your nativity.
—Shakespeare, *Henry IV*, Part I

- (d) THE WHITE BIRDS
I would that we were, my beloved, white birds on the foam
of the sea!
We tire of the flame of the meteor, before it can fade and
flee;
And the flame of the blue star of twilight, hung low on the
rim of the sky,
Has awaked in our hearts, my beloved, a sadness that may
not die.

A weariness comes from those dreamers, dew dabbled, the
 lily and rose;
 Ah, dream not of them, my beloved, the flame of the
 meteor that goes,
 Or the flame of the blue star that lingers hung low in the
 fall of the dew:
 For I would we were changed to white birds on the wander-
 ing foam: I and you!

I am haunted by numberless islands, and many a Danaan
 shore,
 Where Time would surely forget us, and Sorrow come near
 us no more;
 Soon far from the rose and the lily, and fret of the flames
 would we be,
 Were we only white birds, my beloved, buoyed out on the
 foam of the sea!

—William Butler Yeats

6. What associated images are suggested by the sound of
 the words in the following?

- (a) The soft complaining Flute
 In dying notes discovers
 The woes of hopeless lovers,
 Whose dirge is whispered by the warbling Lute.
 Sharp Violins proclaim
 Their jealous pangs, and desperation,
 Fury, frantic indignation,
 Depth of pains, and height of passion,
 For the fair, disdainful dame.

—Dryden, *Song for St. Cecilia's Day*

- (b) Oh, the wild joys of living! the leaping from rock up to
 rock,
 The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the cool
 silver shock
 Of the plunge in a pool's living water.

—Browning, *Saul*

- (c) Out of the hills of Habersham,
 Down the valleys of Hall,
 I hurry amain to reach the plain,
 Run the rapid and leap the fall,
 Split at the rock and together again,
 Accept my bed, or narrow or wide,
 And flee from folly on every side

With a lover's pain to attain the plain
 Far from the hills of Habersham,
 Far from the valleys of Hall.

—Lanier, *Song of the Chattahoochee*

- (d) The dispute "on this right wing was hot and stiff, for three quarters of an hour." Plenty of fire, from field-pieces, snap-hances, matchlocks, entertains the Scotch main-battle across the Brock;—poor stiffened men, roused from the corn-shocks with their matches all out! But here on the right, their horse, "with lancers in the front rank," charge desperately; drive us back across the hollow of the Rivulet;—back a little; but the Lord gives us courage, and we storm home again, horse and foot, upon them, with a shock like tornado tempests; break them, beat them, drive them all adrift.

—Carlyle, *Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*

7. Pick out the specific descriptive words in the following passages. To what sense imagery do they appeal?

- (a) So, with unusual gladness, on he hies
 Through caves, and palaces and mottled ore,
 Gold dome, and crystal wall, and turquoise floor,
 Black polish'd porticoes of awful shade,
 And, at the last, a diamond balustrade,
 Leading afar past wild magnificence,
 Spiral through ruggedest loopholes.

—Keats, *Endymion*

- (b) How quiet everything was at the end of the quays on the last night on which I went out for a service cruise as a guest of the Marseilles pilots! Not a footstep, except my own, not a sigh, not a whispering echo of the usual revelry going on in the narrow, unspeakable lanes of the Old Town reached my ear—and suddenly, with a terrific jingling rattle of iron and glass, the omnibus of the Joliette on its last journey swung round the corner of the dead wall which faces across the paved road the characteristic angular mass of the Fort St. Jean. Three horses trotted abreast with the clatter of hoofs on the granite setts, and the yellow, uproarious machine jolted violently behind them, fantastic, lighted up, perfectly empty and with the driver apparently asleep on his swaying perch above that amazing racket.

—Conrad, *A Personal Record*

8. How does allusion help to create images in the following?

- (a) Lamb, *The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers*
 (b) The roof was fretted gold. Not Babilon,
 Nor great Alcairo such magnificence
 Equalled in all their glories, to inshrine
 Belus or Serapis their gods, or seat
 Their kings, when Ægypt with Assyria strove
 In wealth and luxury.

—Milton, *Paradise Lost*

- (c) Divers besides have there been which by private conspiracies, open rebellions, close wiles, cruel witchcrafts, have sought to end her life, which saveth all their lives, whose practices by the divine providence of the Almighty, have ever been disclosed, insomuch that he hath kept her safe in the whale's belly when her subjects went about to throw her into the sea, preserved her in the hot oven, when her enemies increased the fire, not suffering a hair to fall from her, much less any harm to fasten upon her.

—Lyly, *Euphues and His England*

9. Pick out the suggestive words and phrases in all the passages given in the previous exercises and also in the following:

- (a) Or the visible scene
 Would enter unawares into his mind
 With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
 Its woods, and that uncertain heaven received
 Into the bosom of the steady lake.

—Wordsworth, *The Prelude*

- (b) A suddenly projected arm snatches the lantern off the quay—and, warped along by a line at first, then with the regular tug of four heavy sweeps in the bow, the big half-decked boat full of men glides out of the black, breathless shadow of the Fort. The open water of the *avant-port* glitters under the moon as if sown over with millions of sequins, and the long white breakwater shines like a thick bar of solid silver. With a quick rattle of blocks and one single silky swish, the sail is filled by a little breeze keen enough to have come straight down from the frozen moon, and the boat, after the clatter of hauled-in sweeps, seems to stand at rest, surrounded by a mysterious whispering so faint and unearthly that it may be the rustling of the brilliant, over-powering moonrays breaking like a rain-shower upon the hard, smooth, shadowless sea.

—Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record*

10. Criticise the following figures of speech:

- (a) The boxes at that time, full of well-dressed women of quality, projected over the pit; and the pilasters reaching down were adorned with a glistening substance (I know not what) under glass (as it seemed), resembling—a homely fancy—but I judged it to be sugar-candy—yet, to my raised imagination, divested of its homelier qualities, it appeared a glorified candy! . . . The curtain drew up—I was not past six years old—and the play was Artaxerxes!

—Lamb, *My First Play*

- (b) He showed you all his thoughts: as someone once said, his brain was like a beehive under glass—you could watch all its workings. And the honey in it!

—E. V. Lucas, *A Funeral* (in *Character and Comedy*)

- (c) I went to the university; but was soon torn from thence by that violent public storm, which would suffer nothing to stand where it did, but rooted up every plant, even from the princely cedars, to me, the hyssop.

—Cowley, *Of Myself*

- (d) Certainly virtue is like precious odours, most fragrant when they are incensed or crushed: for prosperity doth best discover vice; but adversity doth best discover virtue.

—Bacon, *Of Adversity*

- (e) The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers.

—Wordsworth, "The World is Too Much With Us"

- (f) The sun was gone now; the curled moon
Was like a little feather
Fluttering far down the gulf.

—Rossetti, *The Blessed Damozel*

- (g) Words are like leaves; and where they most abound,
Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.

—Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*

- (h) So, when the Sun in bed,
Curtained with cloudy red,
Pillows his chin upon an orient wave.

—Milton, *Hymn on the Nativity*

- (i) Through the leaves the flakes of moon-fire fall like phantom tears.

—"A. E.," *The Robing of the King*

- (j) His life was like a bugle
That winds itself away;
His elegy an echo,
His requiem ecstasy.
- Emily Dickinson

- (k) This fern of sunset frond on frond
 opening in a rare
 slowness of gloried air.
 —E. E. Cummings

(1) A CLAWPRICK IN THE MOON

An aspen and a wind at play,
Swiftsilver wakers of a day,
When every lifted leaf, aware,
Sways on the touches of the air;
A flake of shivered light; a kiss
To tilt a feather: love is this.

A woodman's faggot put ablaze—
A cage all gold and windy praise,
A twisted pack that glows entire
And palace built of sound and fire;
A strength, a rage, a pride, a cost:
So love is that; and that is lost.

A star-deep water folded bare,
An aspen thin in ghostly air,
A sign, a memory, a bird flown,
A wild bird's clawprick in the moon,
The woodman's dream of fallen snow
And the wind fallen: love is so.

—Geoffrey Scott (from *A Box of Paints*)

- (m) Shrill shrieks in our faces the blind bland air that was mute
as a maiden,
Stung into storm by the speed of our passage, and deaf
where we past.

—Swinburne, *Hesperia*

- (n) Day!
Faster and more fast,
O'er night's brim, day boils at last:
Boils, pure gold, o'er the cloud-cup's brim
Where spurting and suppressed it lay;
For not a froth-flake touched the rim

Of yonder gap in the solid gray
 Of the eastern cloud, an hour away;
 But forth one wavelet, then another, curled,
 Till the whole sunrise, not to be suppressed,
 Rose, reddened, and its seething breast
 Flickered in bounds, grew gold, then overflowed the world.
 —Browning, *Pippa Passes*

- (o) As some rich woman, on a winter's morn,
 Eyes through her silken curtains the poor drudge
 Who with numb blacken'd fingers makes her fire—
 At cock-crow, on a starlit winter's morn,
 When the frost flowers the whiten'd window panes—
 And wonders how she lives, and what the thoughts
 Of that poor drudge may be; so Rustum eyed
 The unknown adventurous Youth.

—Arnold, *Sohrab and Rustum*

- (p) Careless forever, beautiful proud sea,
 You laugh in happy thunder all alone,
 You fold upon yourself, you dance your dance
 Impartially on drift-weed, sand or stone.
 —Sara Teasdale, "Beautiful, Proud Sea"
 (from *Dark of the Moon*)

11. Bring in some poem or passage of prose to criticise from the point of view of imaginative expression.

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CHAPTER IX

EXERCISES

1. Summarize the plots of five nineteenth century novels and of five contemporary novels. Compare them as to complexity of plot, number of characters, point of view of author.
2. What makes the plots of the following stories interesting: Stockton, *The Lady or the Tiger*; Poe, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*; Aldrich, *Marjorie Daw*; O. Henry, *The Gift of the Magi*; Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*; Thackeray, *The Newcomes*; Conrad, *The Nigger of the Narcissus*; Scott, *Ivanhoe*; Hardy, *The Return of the Native*?
3. What qualities in the following characters from fiction interest you: Emma, the Vicar of Wakefield, Robinson Crusoe, Jeanie Deans, Meg Merrilies, Mr. Pickwick, Bill Sykes, Sidney Carton, Bella Wilfer, Becky Sharp, Major Pendennis, Mr. Slope, Miss Matty Jenkyns, Hetty Sorrel, Maggie Tulliver, Diana Merion, Uncle Toby, Eustacia Vye, Alan Breck, Captain John Silver, Robert Elsmere, the Brushwood Boy, Kim, Lord Jim, Theobald Pontifex, Denry, Soames Forsyte, Mr. Britling, Silas Lapham, Donatello, Tom Sawyer, Natty Bumppo?
4. Study the methods by which the characters listed above are presented to the reader.
5. Study the setting in the following stories. For what purpose is it used? How is it presented? Does it fulfill the requirements suggested in the text? Hardy, *The Return of the Native*; Stevenson, *The Sire de Maletroit's Door*; O. Henry, *Mammon and the Archer*; Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*; Jane Austen, *Persuasion*; Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*; Meredith, *Richard Feverel*; Lewis, *Main Street*; Elinor Wylie, *Jennifer Lorn*.
6. Do you find the ideas expressed in the following stories interesting? Why? Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*; Maria Edge-

worth, *Castle Rackrent*; Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*; Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*; Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*; Galsworthy, *Fraternity*; Wells, *Joan and Peter*; Tolstoi, *War and Peace*; Wasserman, *The Goose-Man*; Ford, *A Man Could Stand Up*.

7. Find five stories, long or short, which you consider beautiful, and determine where the beauty in each lies.
8. Write a review of a contemporary novel.
9. Write a critical paper on the work of a novelist.

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CHAPTER X

EXERCISES

1. Prepare a critical report on a biography, an autobiography, a diary, a book of memoirs, or a collection of letters. Suggestions: Boswell, *Life of Dr. Samuel Johnson*; Trevelyan, *The Life and Letters of Macaulay*; Hendrick, *The Life and Letters of Walter Hines Page*; Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln*; Bok, *The Making of an American*; Amy Lowell, *John Keats*; Plutarch, *Parallel Lives of the Greeks and Romans*;

Barrie, *Margaret Ogilvy*; Pepys, *Diary*; Lamb, *Letters*; Cellini, *Autobiography*; M. A. D. Howe, *Memories of a Hostess*.

2. Name as many histories as you can that are literature. Report on the literary qualities and value of one of them.
3. Prepare to make a critical report on a single essay. Some essayists who will repay study are Charles Lamb, E. V. Lucas, R. W. Emerson, T. B. Macaulay, Agnes Repplier, William Beebe, Logan Pearsall Smith, R. L. Stevenson, Don Marquis, H. L. Mencken. The following are good collections of essays: Rhys, Ernest (ed.), *A Century of English Essays*, "Everyman's Library," Dutton, 1913; Morley, Christopher (ed.), *Modern Essays*, First and Second Series, Harcourt, Brace and Co., [c 1921, 1924].

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CHAPTER XI

EXERCISES

1. Would the following novels make good plays? Why, or why not? George Eliot, *Adam Bede*; Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*; Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*; Galsworthy, *The White Monkey*; Meredith, *Diana of the Crossways*; Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, *Pendennis*.
2. Prepare a critical paper on the work of a dramatist, basing it on a study of at least three of his plays. Use these plays in following the exercises given below. Suggestions: Barrie, O'Neill, Galsworthy, Pinero, Milne, Sheridan, Dryden, Dekker.
3. Are the plays you have chosen for study truly dramatic? Are they well adapted for presentation on the stage? Have they a definite purpose?
4. Study the dialogue of some prose play, preferably one by the author you have chosen. Is it interesting? always? Is it natural? Is it clear? Is it appropriate to the play? Is it

useful? Is it concise? Does it characterize the speakers successfully?

5. Read the opening scenes of three plays and examine them critically for faults and virtues in the exposition of facts (is it clear? adequate? redundant? forced?), the setting of the tone of the play, the correct emphasis on the characters and on the central purpose.
6. Study the middle scenes of these plays. Do they lead inevitably to the climax? Is there in them anything unnecessary or irrelevant?
7. Where is the climax of these plays placed? Is it well placed? Is it marred by what comes before or what comes after? Does the stage picture support the effect of the emotional crisis?
8. Study the closing scenes of these plays, considering the speed of the conclusion, the use of surprise and suspense, the quietness or the turmoil of the conclusion, and the emphasis (as in the opening scenes). Is the happiness or unhappiness of the outcome justified?
9. Consider the characters in one play. Are they real people or are they puppets? What makes them so? Does the story grow out of their characters or are they created to fit the story or the theme? Does the ending, happy or unhappy, come as the inevitable result of their characters or in spite of them? Are there any unnecessary characters? What use has the dramatist made of character contrast? Is one character exploited at the expense of the others?

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CHAPTER XII

EXERCISES

1. Gather from the references all the definitions of poetry that you can find. Do you agree with any one? If not, why not? How would you define it?
2. Read the following poems, comparing the different uses of the same symbol:
 - (a) Watson, *Hymn to the Sea*, and Masfield, *Sea-Fever*
 - (b) Keats, *To Autumn*, Shelley, *To the West Wind*, and Watson, *Autumn*
 - (c) Arnold, *Philomela* and Keats, *Ode to a Nightingale*
 - (d) Sandburg, *Chicago*, Wordsworth, *Sonnet on Westminster Bridge*, and F. S. Flint, *London*

3. Find other examples than those given in the text of the choice of different symbols to express similar visions.
4. Find examples of the use of the different meters and stanzaic forms mentioned in the text. Is the metrical form in each case well chosen?
5. Is the general tendency in poetry today toward or away from the regular meters? For an answer to this question, study the current magazines, both those of a general nature and those which are devoted especially to poetry.
6. Study, according to the principles given in the text, the structure of the lyric poems in Book I of Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*.
7. Study the diction of the following sonnet. Do you agree with the comment on it? Would you make any other criticisms?

"Lately, remembering how since ancient days
 The master-poet lovers have outpoured
 Their heart's high-throbbing songs, and the adored
 Immortalized by amatory praise,
 I sighed, 'All has been said; there is no phrase
 Of tenderness unused; there is no chord
 Unchimed, no fancy that has not been stored
 Away in curio-wise for public gaze.'
 Last night, beside the star-reflecting lake
 We walked, your beauty's pale serenity
 More lovely than the peaceful night; the ache
 Of my world-weary heart you soothed for me,
 And now I know, I know that I shall make
 New Songs to you throughout eternity.

(F. F.)

"*Comment:* In rhyme arrangement, except for the identical rhymes, 'eternity; serenity,' and in balance of parts you have a good sonnet. Certain heavy phrases mar it . . . 'Master-poet lovers,' 'heart's high-throbbing songs,' 'beauty's pale serenity.' In line 4 'in' for 'by' seems better in sound and phrase. 'My heart you soothed for me'—too much as if your heart were a thing apart; I should like these two lines better in this shape:

'More soothing than the peaceful night; the ache
 Of my world-weary heart was healed (or stilled) in me.'

Possessives before adjectives with nouns,—that is a thing to avoid in these phrases. 'High, heart-throbbing, or (heart-thrilling) songs'; 'passionate serenity,' or, if you cling to the 'pale,' 'rosy pale,' or 'lily pale,' as the case may be. Wouldn't 'star-besprinkled' be less prosaic than 'star-reflecting'?"

—Carruth, W. H., *Versé Writing* (Macmillan, 1917), pp. 114-115.

8. Choose a poem to discuss from the point of view of diction.
9. Criticise the following poems. Base your criticism on the principles formulated in this chapter and on the discussion of the values of good literature in general contained in Chapters II-VIII inclusive.

(a) NOT BY THE SEA

Not by the sea, but somewhere in the hills,
Not by the sea, but in the uplands surely
There must be rest where a dim pool demurely
Watches all night the stern slow-moving skies;

Not by the sea, that never was appeased,
Not by the sea, whose immemorial longing
Shames the tired earth where even longing dies,
Not by the sea that bore Iseult and Helen,
But in a dark green hollow of the hills
There must be sleep, even for sleepless eyes.

—Sara Teasdale (from *Dark of the Moon*)

(b) THE DARK HILLS

Dark hills at evening in the west,
Where sunset hovers like a sound
Of golden horns that sang to rest
Old bones of warriors under ground,
Far now from all the bannered ways
Where flash the legions of the sun,
You fade—as if the last of days
Were fading, and all wars were done.

—Edwin Arlington Robinson

(c) A QUIET STREET AFTER RAIN

Glittering keen, all things appear
Clairvoyant, carved, and crystal-clear,
Happy to watch the raindrops cease,
Houses are honeycombed with peace;

And dazzling with a blazing show,
 Windows are pelting suns below.
 Colors are ambushing the sense
 With silent, flaming eloquence.
 For every front-yard lawn is seen
 Twinkling a myriad tongues of green.
 Marvelous, too, it is to see
 A rose-bush dipped in deity!
 Nearby a spider has begun
 Upon a fence to thread the sun.
 The street is hushed, though far off steals
 The powdery, crumbling sound of wheels. . . .
 Till Time, who loiters by to scrawl
 A warning on a garden wall,
 Lingers to watch in strange amaze
 How quiet loveliness can blaze—
 How immortality can be
 Familiar as a fence or tree!
 —Louis Ginsberg (from *Literary Review*, May 10, 1924)

(d) ON GROWING OLD

Be with me, Beauty, for the fire is dying,
 My dog and I are old, too old for roving,
 Man, whose young passion sets the spindrift flying,
 Is soon too lame to march, too cold for loving.

I take the book and gather to the fire,
 Turning old yellow leaves; minute by minute,
 The clock ticks to my heart; a withered wire
 Moves a thin ghost of music in the spinet.

I cannot sail your seas, I cannot wander
 Your cornland, nor your hill-land nor your valleys,
 Ever again, nor share the battle yonder
 Where the young knight the broken squadron rallies.
 Only stay quiet while my mind remembers
 The beauty of fire from the beauty of embers.

—John Masefield

(e) THE DEBT¹

Because the years are few, I must be glad;
 Because the silence is so near, I sing;
 'Twere ill to quit an inn where I have had
 Such bounteous fare, nor pay my reckoning.

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I would not, from some gleaming parapet
 Of Sirius or Vega, bend my gaze
 On a remembered sparkle and regret
 That from it thanklessly I went my ways
 Up through the starry colonnades, nor found
 Violets in any Paradise more blue
 Than those that blossomed on my own waste ground,
 Nor vespers sweeter than the robins knew.

Though Earth be but an outpost of delight,
 Heaven's wild frontier by tragedy beset,
 Only a Shakespeare may her gifts requite,
 Only a happy Raphael pay his debt.
 Yet I—to whom even as to those are given
 Cascading foam, emblazoned butterflies,
 The moon's pearl chariot through the massed clouds driven,
 And the divinity of loving eyes—
 Would make my peace now with mine hostess Earth,
 Give and take pardon for all brief annoy,
 And toss her, far beneath my lodging's worth,
 Poor that I am, a coin of golden joy.

—Katherine Lee Bates

(f)

WHEN

When mine hour is come
 Let no teardrop fall
 And no darkness hover
 Round me where I lie.
 Let the vastness call
 One who was its lover,
 Let me breathe the sky.

Where the lordly light
 Walks along the world,
 And its silent tread
 Leaves the grasses bright,
 Leaves the flowers uncurled,
 Let me to the dead
 Breathe a gay goodnight.

—"A. E."

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